

ENHANCING KINDERGARTEN TRANSITION PRACTICES FOR
PRESCHOOLERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: EFFECTS ON
CHILD OUTCOMES AND PARENT-TEACHER
INVOLVEMENT

by

Stacey Pollard Graziano

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STATEMENT OF DISSERTATION APPROVAL

The dissertation of Stacey Pollard Graziano
has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u>Lora Tuesday-Heathfield</u>	, Chair	<u>12/3/2014</u> Date Approved
<u>Daniel Olympia</u>	, Member	<u>12/3/2014</u> Date Approved
<u>Janiece Pompa</u>	, Member	<u>12/3/2014</u> Date Approved
<u>Michael Gardner</u>	, Member	<u>12/3/2014</u> Date Approved
<u>Andrea McDonnell</u>	, Member	<u>12/3/2014</u> Date Approved

and by Anne Cook, Chair/Dean of
the Department/College/School
of Educational Psychology

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

The transition from preschool to kindergarten can produce a period of disruption for many children and their families in regards to the anticipation of changes in services and providers, and in some cases, a complete change in setting. This is particularly true for preschool students with disabilities who receive services under an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Many parents of children with special needs indicate that they received little information regarding the transition process and that their input was not valued. Children who experience inefficient transitions from preschool to kindergarten are often described by their kindergarten teachers as being less academically and socially prepared for kindergarten. These perceptions may follow children as they progress through school and lead to increased difficulties in the school setting.

The purpose of this study was to investigate kindergarten transition practices for preschoolers with special needs by examining child outcomes and the impact on parent-teacher involvement as a result of the transition process. Results indicated no significant differences were found between the control and intervention groups in regards to the effects of enhanced transition practices on academic and social outcomes. These results also indicated no significant differences between the control and intervention groups and perceptions of parent and teacher involvement as well as parent and teacher perceptions of transition effectiveness and acceptability.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been an increase in funding directed toward early childhood programs to ensure readiness for kindergarten. However, this funding has been largely focused on enhancing early childhood competencies and functional preacademic skills. While these skills are important components of kindergarten transitions from preschool, there are other factors to be considered during the transition process, such as effective communication with families and the receiving school teams. Successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten are also a function of linkages that are made between systems, such as connections between schools and families and between preschool teachers and kindergarten classrooms (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). These relationships not only have an impact on successful outcomes for preschoolers, but also the overall perceptions of families and participating school teams regarding smooth transition practices.

Relationships between schools and families as well as preschool teachers and kindergarten classrooms and their impact on preschool transition has become a recent area of interest. Research in this area suggests that children who have experienced an ineffective transition between preschool and kindergarten may be at increased risk for school failure and social maladjustment (Conyers, Reynolds, & Ou 2003). Further

research is needed to identify effective transition practices leading to overall kindergarten success.

School Transitions

The transition from preschool to kindergarten is just one of many transitions that children make throughout their years in school. However, the transition between preschool and kindergarten can produce a period of disruption for many children and their families in regards to the anticipation of changes in services and providers, and in some cases, a complete change in setting. This is particularly true for preschool students with disabilities who are receiving services under an Individualized Education Program (IEP). One study found a third of parents of kindergartners with disabilities were dissatisfied with services they received during the transition process (Janus, Lefort, Cameron, & Kopechanski, 2007) and reported a lack of involvement and understanding of the kindergarten transition process.

Inviting parents to participate and take part in planning during the transition process is one strategy designed to alleviate uncertainty surrounding the kindergarten transition. This is a strategy that appears to resonate with many parents; one study suggested that 87% of parents reported a desire to share in the responsibility for planning their child's transition (Fowler, Chandler, Johnson, & Stella, 1988). Recent research has also suggested a systems approach model may be helpful when planning for transitions. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) indicate that successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten are a function of linkages made between systems, such as connections between schools and families and between preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Academic and Social Concerns

Linkages between systems are of particular importance, given the results of a national survey of teachers who identified problems during the transition to kindergarten. The development of ready school indicators (National Education Goals Panel, 1998), which aimed to smooth transition practices and increase parental involvement prompted future research in the area of school transition practices. Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000) found that 48% of children transitioning to kindergarten were described by their teachers as having difficulty adjusting to school. This research, along with other research such as that of Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) found that “school transition practices are related to improved academic achievement and increased parent-initiated school involvement during kindergarten” (p. 870) as well as greater impact of transition practices on lower-income children who are less likely to receive them.

In addition, the majority of research indicates that while preschool programs routinely focus on academic and social aspects of school readiness, student achievement is supported by creating and sustaining respectful and trusting relationships among school staff, families, and community members (Sanders & Harvey, as cited in Hand, 2004). This systems approach to transitions for young children has led to the development of research-based programs that incorporate these important components in their transition philosophies.

High- and Low-Intensity Interventions

Previous research regarding early childhood transitions has classified transition practices into high- or low-intensity strategies. High-intensity practices are those that

require a more intensive commitment of time and resources, such as those that are individualized to a specific child and/or require the coordination of multiple programs. Low-intensity practices are those that require minimal time and resource commitments and include those routinely conducted for all children transitioning, such as letters to families and open houses (Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2010). Although the literature on early childhood transitions has supported the effectiveness of transition practices that are more individualized and time-and resource-intensive, practitioners do not always implement these high-intensity practices. In reality, many teachers and schools have reported that their transition practices take place after the start of the new kindergarten school year and involve primarily low-intensity and generic contact shared with parents through flyers, brochures, or group open houses (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Rathbun & Germino-Hausken, 2001, as cited in LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Although high-intensity transition practices are not always implemented, there is evidence that suggests that parents and teachers both benefit from and want more individualized transition practices that emphasize connections between school and family systems (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). In addition to building better relationships between home and school, these practices have the potential to improve children's abilities to adapt to kindergarten classrooms, particularly for children who may experience social and economic risks (Schulting et al., 2005). Effective transitions that facilitate family involvement may lead to continued involvement beyond the preschool years. Several studies have indicated that parental involvement in schooling leads to higher grades for children as well as better school attendance and more positive attitudes and behaviors, in addition to higher graduation rates and greater enrollment in higher

education programs (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Recent research has also highlighted the importance of cooperation on curriculum issues between preschool and elementary school teachers as an important factor influencing later academic achievement and positive child outcomes (Ahtola et al., 2011; Bogard & Takanishi, 2005; Kagan & Kauerz, 2007).

Due to the varying resources available in early childhood education, experts have recommended that transition teams choose from a variety of high- and low-intensity practices to better serve families and children. Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman, and Cox (1999) suggested that schools should base transition practices on three inter-related principles: (1) Reaching out – schools should make efforts to reach out and link families and preschools in order to both establish relationships and engage in two-way dialogue regarding how to establish effective transition practices; (2) Reaching backward in time – receiving schools should establish links with families prior to the first day of kindergarten; and (3) Reaching out with appropriate intensity – receiving schools should develop and cultivate a variety of practices with varying intensity (i.e., low-intensity flyers or pamphlets along with high-intensity personal contacts or home visits).

Research-Based Transition Programs

A range of transition practices can be found in a variety of model programs that incorporate early childhood transitions, including Terrific Transitions and First 5 California, among others. The majority of these model programs include a combination of both high- and low-intensity interventions from which school staff and parents can choose. Although there are many programs available that provide suggestions for kindergarten transition practices, these two programs are discussed further in regards to

specific high- and low-intensity interventions and their relevance to this study. They are highlighted due to their ready access and wide variety of high-and low-intensity interventions for use with young children.

Terrific Transitions

Terrific Transitions (SERVE, 2004) is a collaboration between the SERVE Regional Educational Laboratory and the National Head Start Association in an effort “to provide a variety of transition information and resources for families, professionals, and community partnerships to use as they address children’s transitions into kindergarten” (Terrific Transitions, n.d., p. 3). Terrific Transitions consists of evidence-based transition practices focusing on effective communication and linkages between families and school teams, as well as linkages between preschool teachers and kindergarten classrooms. Linkages between families and schools are emphasized within the Terrific Transitions framework in order to increase the likelihood that connecting families to schools will help smooth transitions for young children and benefit both families and schools through the mutual sharing of information (SERVE, 2004).

California Children and Families Commission-First 5 California

The purpose of the First 5 California Children and Families Commission’s School Readiness Initiative (First 5) is to improve the ability of families, schools, and communities in preparing children to enter school ready to succeed (Hand, 2004). The First 5 focuses on four components identified by early childhood educators and researchers as critical for successful transitions (Hand, 2004). These include (1) continuity of services, (2) parent/family/community involvement, (3) preparation of children, and (4) collaboration among educators. These four components are based on

evidence that effective transition activities include those that address the whole child while involving families, preparing children, and linking early care and education providers, including preschool and elementary school educators (Hand, 2004).

Both Terrific Transitions and First 5 California include a number of high-intensity transition strategies that can be easily implemented within the early childhood setting. Several of these high-intensity transition practices suggested by both programs were included in this study due to their emphasis on effective communication with families and teams, linkages between schools and families, and communication between preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Within the framework of evidence-based transitions, practices were chosen from these programs due to research that suggests effective transition practices are those that involve reaching out proactively to families and other teachers with a high level of intensity prior to the actual physical move into a new classroom (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2008, as cited in LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

The high-intensity interventions targeted for implementation in this study included the following:

- individual meetings and home visits with parents to discuss their transition concerns in the spring prior to kindergarten transition,
- consultation with preschool teachers about IEP goals and appropriate goals for the kindergarten setting in the spring prior to kindergarten transition,
- facilitated file transfer and sharing of preschool classroom data regarding academics and behavior as well as IEP goals and progress between preschool and kindergarten in the spring prior to kindergarten transition,

- timeline given to parents in the spring prior to kindergarten transition indicating what will occur in the transition process on the sending school's end and next steps for action,
- materials sent over the summer prior to kindergarten transition regarding age-appropriate developmental milestones,
- follow-up telephone call to ascertain and address any parent concerns and questions in the summer prior to kindergarten transition,
- consultation with kindergarten teachers in the fall regarding specific goals and needs for each transitioning student, and
- final parent meeting held in the fall to discuss any issues related to transition to kindergarten.

The majority of research on early childhood transitions focuses on typically developing children, while the current study emphasized transition practices for preschoolers receiving IEP-related services. This is an important area to address, given that families often express a desire for early childhood professionals to provide services that are more family-centered rather than only focusing on the child with disabilities (McWilliam, Tocci, & Harbin, 1998). The above-mentioned high-intensity transition strategies were selected for implementation in this study in an effort to facilitate positive relationships between school professionals and families, especially those families of children with disabilities, and determine if these strategies resulted in more successful transitions. These transition strategies also encouraged parents to participate in the kindergarten transition process and provide an opportunity for school personnel to value parents' knowledge and insight regarding their children.

CBC Consultation Model

Parents and teachers both benefit from and want more personal transition practices that emphasize connections between systems (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Conjoint behavioral consultation (CBC; Sheridan, Kratochwill, & Bergan, 1996) is a method drawn from school psychology research that is designed to focus parent-teacher-consultation around a student's individual functioning (Sheridan, Warnes, Shemm, Cowan, & Clarke, 2004, as cited in Sheridan, Clarke, Knoche, & Edwards, 2006). CBC can best be described as a direct form of service delivery that focuses on parent and teacher relationships while working toward positive academic and/or behavioral outcomes for students. To accomplish these outcomes, the CBC framework focuses on parents and teachers working together to identify, plan, and evaluate interventions as a means to address the needs of students. This framework also serves to support a more ecological, family-centered approach to school readiness which extends the focus from simply centered on "child readiness" for school to a broader focus that addresses "parent, child, and school readiness" (Knoche, Sheridan, Edwards, & Osborn 2010).

Positive transition practices may also be based on a CBC model in order to facilitate teacher-initiated transition practices that involve reaching out proactively to families and other teachers with a high level of intensity prior to the actual physical move into a new classroom (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2008, as cited in LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). The use of CBC to facilitate positive preschool-to-kindergarten transitions may include (a) identifying and defining a primary need (e.g., successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten); (b) establishing mutual goals related to the purpose (e.g., sharing information between the home and school settings); (c) developing a plan that can be used across the home, preschool, and kindergarten settings (e.g., creating

relationships between home and school and preschool to kindergarten settings); (d) implementing components of the plan across settings (e.g., answering parent questions and providing information about the transition process, sharing information about the student between the preschool and kindergarten setting, supporting kindergarten teachers when they have questions about a specific student); (e) collecting and using data to determine if goals have been met (e.g., frequency of contact regarding questions about appropriate placements, levels of parental and school involvement, changes in kindergarten placement); and (f) recycling through the problem-solving stages to address needs as they arise (e.g., reassessing what constitutes a successful transition from preschool to kindergarten (Sheridan et al., 2006). The development and maintenance of strong ties between families and schools is inherent within the CBC model.

CBC is based on a comprehensive 4-stage problem solving process: (1) problem/needs identification, (2) problem/needs analysis, (3) plan development, and (4) plan evaluation (Sheridan et al., 1996). This comprehensive process allows for detailed planning and decision making between both the home and school settings, which can be facilitated by a school psychologist acting in the role of consultant. A consultant can help parents and teachers to work together and guide discussions centered around the child regarding “(a) specific needs, goals, and priorities; (b) appropriate data collection procedures; (c) practical and effective intervention procedures; and (d) plans for evaluation, maintenance, generalization, and follow-up” (Sheridan et al., 2006, p. 5). Given the emphasis on relationship building and communication within the CBC framework, school psychologists are uniquely prepared to address both home and school concerns that are unique to individual students. Several specific examples regarding how school psychologists can facilitate positive transitions from preschool to kindergarten

include “(a) structuring the communication system between kindergarten and preschool; (b) acting as the liaison between kindergarten and preschool teachers, thereby giving the preschools a contact person within the school system; (c) assisting preschools in the development of a uniform developmental rating system for reporting students’ strengths and weaknesses to their future kindergartens; and (d) aiding kindergarten teachers in the interpretation of developmental information that originates from the preschools” (Carlton & Winsler, 1999, p. 346).

School psychologists acting as consultants within the CBC model can serve to strengthen family-school partnerships, promote continuity between home and school, and enhance parent engagement within educational collaboration (Sheridan et al., 2009). This is increasingly important, given the research that suggests that 87% of parents reported a desire to share in the responsibility for planning their child’s transition (Fowler et al., 1988). Enhancing the inclusion of families in the transition process via a consultation model allows families to share unique and useful information about their child while empowering themselves to feel as though they have a sense of expertise or knowledge regarding their children. The empowerment of families during the transition process is of critical importance for families of young children with disabilities, given the individualized services these children may require. Unfortunately, recent research has found that a third of parents of kindergarteners with disabilities were dissatisfied with services they received during the transition process (Janus et al., 2007). School psychologists acting in the role of consultants are more than qualified to share information regarding specific disabilities while helping to empower parents to advocate for their children and assist in planning for their children’s specific needs as they transition to kindergarten.

Although CBC's success with academic, social, and behavioral issues in school-aged children is well documented (Sheridan & Kratochwill, 2007), it has recently been utilized within early childhood populations and was found to effectively address behavioral, academic, and social-emotional concerns shared by parents and teachers (Sheridan et al., 2006). Additionally "parents reported significant changes in their perceptions of communication with their child's educator after completing CBC, and both parents and teachers reported high levels of acceptability, satisfaction, and goal attainment" (Sheridan et al., 2006, p. 609).

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the kindergarten transition process is to prepare parents, children, and teachers for the transition between preschool and kindergarten, as well as to provide kindergarten staff with information regarding the educational and social needs of their transitioning students. The proposed study was designed to evaluate the relationship between specific kindergarten transition processes and resulting parent-teacher involvement. The study was also designed to investigate overall kindergarten outcomes based on student performance on curriculum-based academic measures taken in the fall and winter of kindergarten. Social and behavioral outcomes were also measured through the comparison of behavior ratings on the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) taken in the spring of preschool and fall of kindergarten, along with ratings on the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) taken in the fall of kindergarten.

Participants and Research Measures

Parents and teachers of preschool students with IEPs were recruited for the present study. The age range of preschool students participating in this study was from 4

to 5 years old. Parents and teachers who participated in the study agreed to complete interviews and questionnaires, and in the case of the intervention group, participate in CBC-facilitated transition meetings. In order to assess parent and teacher satisfaction with the transition process, the Parent–Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (PTIQ), as well as a Preschool Transition Survey, was developed for use with the kindergarten teacher and parents. More specific information about these measures can be found in the Methods section. Participants were randomly placed in either an intervention or control group, which determined which transition procedures they received.

Research Questions

1. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parents’ perceptions of their school involvement?*** This question was answered using data from the PTIQ parent version administered in preschool prior to transitioning and again toward the end of the kindergarten year.
2. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact teachers’ perceptions of parents’ school involvement?*** This question was answered using data from the teacher version of the PTIQ, which was administered in preschool prior to transitioning and again toward the end of the kindergarten year.
3. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parent and/or teacher perception of the success of the transition to kindergarten?*** This question was answered using data from the parent and teacher versions of the Preschool Transition Survey, administered toward the end of the kindergarten year.

4. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parents' and/or teachers' acceptability of transition strategies?*** This question was answered using data from the Transition Acceptability Rating Scale – Parent Version and the Transition Acceptability Rating Scale – Teacher Version, both administered toward the end of the kindergarten year.
5. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact child social skills outcomes?*** This question was answered using data from the SSIS toward the end of the kindergarten year.
6. ***Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact child academic outcomes in reading and/or mathematics?*** This question was answered using data from the beginning (Fall) and middle (Winter) of kindergarten using CBM benchmarking assessments of early literacy and early math skills.

CHAPTER II

METHODS

Recruitment

The Institutional Review Board of the University of Utah as well as the Office of Research and Assessment in the participating school district approved this study. Upon approval, the primary investigator (PI) sent home flyers to eligible students in special education preschool classrooms during the spring of the 2012–2013 school year in the participating school district. All of the parents selected had preschoolers who would start kindergarten during the 2013–2014 school year and were currently receiving IEP services. The preschool students selected were eligible for special education services in the eligibility categories of Speech Language Impairment (SLI), Developmental Delay (DD), Autism, Other Health Impairment (OHI), or Intellectual Disability (ID) as outlined in the USOE Rules for Special Education (Utah State Office of Education, 2007). Eligible parents of students were selected based on their home school boundaries, which placed them at one of 14-targeted elementary schools.

The 14 targeted elementary schools were distributed throughout the participating school district, which is a large suburban district located in the Western United States. The targeted elementary schools enrolled students from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds as represented by the percentage of students receiving free and reduced lunch. Additionally, the participating school district consists of a total student enrollment

of 33,676 with a total of 3,268 students identified as receiving special education services. Of the 14 elementary schools included in the study, all had 30% or fewer students who qualified for free and reduced lunch. The target schools ranged from 451–904 total students enrolled, had less than 30% students who identified as belonging to a minority group, and had 43% or fewer students from low income socioeconomic backgrounds, and no targeted school reported more than 21% of its student population classified with a disability. Title I schools were excluded in an effort to ensure the 14 elementary schools chosen were as similar as possible regarding the overall socioeconomic make-up of the school's population.

Secondary participants included the participating students' current preschool special education teachers, as well as their receiving kindergarten teachers and related services personnel who would be providing services to the students included in the study. Related service personnel included speech language pathologists or school psychologists who were in attendance at the spring transition meeting or would be providing direct services to the student in the fall. Related service personnel were included in the study if students only received speech therapy or if they requested consultation from the principal investigator in order to develop appropriate goals for the student as he or she transitioned to kindergarten.

The 14 targeted elementary schools were randomly categorized into two groups: an intervention group and a control group. The parent participants were subsequently divided into the intervention group or the control group, depending upon their child's receiving school. Randomization of participants occurred only by school level to avoid teachers at the same school being placed in different groups (i.e., intervention and control group). Similarly, the secondary participants (kindergarten teachers and related services

personnel) were either in the intervention group or the control group, depending upon which targeted school the receiving kindergarten class was located.

Inclusion Criteria: Primary Participants

Primary participants included parents of preschoolers in the participating school district who would be receiving IEP services and transitioning to kindergarten during the 2013–2014 school year. Parents of preschoolers were selected based on their home boundary school and their child’s anticipated attendance at one of 14 targeted elementary schools. In addition, preschool children of participating parents were required to meet the inclusion criteria listed below:

1. Received preschool special education services under a current Individualized Education Plan.
2. Maintained a current special education classification of Speech Language Impairment (SLI), Developmental Delay (DD), Autism, Other Health Impairment (OHI), or Intellectual Disability (ID) as determined by the Utah State Board of Education Rules for Special Education (USOE, 2007).
3. Must have been identified by their preschool special education teacher as eligible to attend a traditional kindergarten setting as opposed to a diagnostic kindergarten or an alternative kindergarten setting. Preschoolers who would be attending a diagnostic or alternative kindergarten setting were excluded in order to ensure the majority of student participants did not have significant behavioral or academic challenges that would prevent them from attending their home school.

All of the participating parents had a child who attended a preschool classroom designed for students with IEP services within the participating school district. The participating school district houses 11 special education preschool classrooms based in five different elementary schools throughout the district, and the majority of these classrooms are made up of students with IEP-related services. Two additional preschool classrooms, which are designed to provide early access to academics for children from economically disadvantaged backgrounds, are based at two Title I elementary schools within the participating school district. Each of the five special education preschool sites has two classrooms taught by special education teachers with an early childhood endorsement. The exception to this standard are the Title I preschool sites, which consist of a single classroom at each school. Each preschool classroom has separate morning and afternoon classes, each consisting of 8 to 12 preschool students. Although the majority of students within each classroom receive IEP services, there are also a small number of tuition-paying students who are accepted into the program to serve as peer models for their classmates with disabilities.

Inclusion Criteria: Secondary Participants

Secondary participants included current special education preschool teachers who provided services to participating children, as well as the receiving kindergarten teachers and associated related service personnel, including special education teachers, speech language pathologists, and school psychologists who may have participated in transition meetings and would be providing direct services to the child in the fall.

Procedures

Participating parents of eligible preschool children were asked to complete surveys covering a range of topics such as parents' household and family background, as well as information specific to their child's disability and social and emotional functioning. They were also asked about their perceptions of transition practices as well as their child's experience with special education and related services. Participating parents in the control group were involved in district-level transition practices consisting of an optional open house describing the transition from preschool to kindergarten and potential kindergarten placements, as well as spring conferences with preschool teachers regarding recommendations for kindergarten classrooms and review of yearly progress. Parents included in the intervention group may have also attended the optional open house and spring preschool conferences to discuss kindergarten placements. In addition, they were provided with a home visit during the spring to address individual concerns, an invitation to attend the spring transition meeting with receiving kindergarten staff, written materials related to appropriate developmental milestones during the summer before their child entered kindergarten, and a transition timeline of anticipated events. Parents in the intervention group also received telephone contact during the summer as another opportunity to address any transition concerns.

Data regarding perceptions of the kindergarten transition were collected from parents and teachers through surveys. Parents and teachers also provided information regarding their perceptions of parent-teacher involvement, as well as their interactions throughout the transition process and their perceptions of participating students' social and emotional functioning. Information regarding participating students' performance on

curriculum-based assessments in reading and math was also collected from the school district's database.

The children included in this study were those who were eligible for special education services, but were not identified as needing an alternative kindergarten setting such as diagnostic kindergarten or a cluster placement for low academics or challenging behaviors. Throughout the study, data were collected regarding any requests for changes in placements to more restrictive settings such as a diagnostic kindergarten, as well as consultation requests made to the researcher in the role of school psychologist. Teachers and parents were also asked in the fall of kindergarten whether they believed their student was placed appropriately in a regular kindergarten setting.

All participants in the study, including the special education preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, students, and their parents, were treated in accordance with the ethical standards outlined by the American Psychological Association (2002). The study also included components of the conjoint behavior consultation model that focused on connecting both school and family systems while increasing communication between home and school settings as well as between preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Within this study, the researcher filled the role of the school psychologist as well as consultant and liaison. The purpose of the study as well as the need for examining transition practices were explained to all participants and any questions or concerns regarding the study were addressed.

The parents or guardians of transitioning preschool students who met eligibility criteria for the study were contacted by telephone or in person at their child's school by the principal investigator. Parents were also given information regarding the purpose of the study and had the opportunity to ask questions pertaining to their participation and

requirements involved in completing the study. Informed consent was obtained in person from parents of students who qualified for the study, in addition to their preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Control Group Procedures

After the researcher determined whether a student met inclusion criteria, they were assigned to either a control group or intervention group based on the elementary school they would attend, which was identified as a control or intervention school site based on a randomization method. The control group participants did not receive any specialized transition practices beyond the services that are usually provided to preschoolers with IEPs transitioning to kindergarten in the targeted school district. The general transition services that are provided to all preschoolers with IEPs include an optional open house in the spring. This open house provides parents with information regarding possible kindergarten placements, including a regular kindergarten setting with IEP services and a diagnostic kindergarten setting. A diagnostic kindergarten resembles a special education preschool setting with a low student to staff ratio (usually three adults for a maximum of 12 students) and is designed to provide interventions for students who have academic, social, or behavioral challenges and would otherwise have difficulty succeeding in a general education kindergarten classroom. Preschool teachers of transitioning students also hold a file transfer day in the spring where they turn over student files to the receiving kindergarten staff member. The kindergarten staff member is usually a special education teacher who will be providing direct services to the student during the upcoming school year or a speech language pathologist for students who only require IEP services for speech language impairment. The file transfer held in the spring

is usually the only transition practice that is considered high-intensity that is included in the regular transition practice in the participating school district. Preschool and kindergarten teams usually have about 15 minutes to discuss the transitioning preschooler, as well as their concerns for the kindergarten year. Parents and teachers of control group participants also completed questionnaires designed to examine their perceptions of the preschool transition process in regards to their feelings of being supported and informed throughout the transition.

Intervention Group Procedures

The intervention group received enhanced transition practices that included both high- and low-intensity transition components compared to standard transition practices that were already in place in a large suburban school district. The intervention package included evidence-based transition practices designed to prepare parents, children, and teachers for the kindergarten transition and enhance home-school connections. This intervention package also provided kindergarten staff with information regarding specific children's educational and social needs through a planned spring meeting with the preschool teacher, the kindergarten teacher (or support staff), and the parent. These transition practices allowed parents to actively contribute and participate in the transition process by attending the planning meeting regarding their child and providing information regarding their child's social and academic functioning while also sharing concerns for their child. Kindergarten teachers also had the benefit of receiving detailed information from parents and preschool teachers regarding individual children's needs and their progress during preschool.

Parents of participating students in the intervention group were provided with

additional supports during the transition process. Parents of students in the intervention group received a booklet over the summer describing appropriate developmental milestones and social skills pertaining to preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten. This booklet was developed as part of the More for Four Initiative within the Curriculum and Early Childhood Departments in the participating school district, in an effort to prepare parents of 4-year-old students transitioning to kindergarten as to classroom expectations regarding their child's developmental, academic, and social skills. The booklet also provided parents with information on skills that they could work on at home with their children in order to better prepare them for kindergarten.

Kindergarten teachers and ancillary staff of transitioning preschoolers in the intervention group had the option of participating in an individualized consultation with the researcher in the role of school psychologist in the fall of the kindergarten year. The consultation was designed to provide teachers and ancillary staff with the opportunity to ask any questions regarding the student or the IEP that were not previously answered during the file transfer meeting held in the spring. The spring file transfer meeting typically lasts 15 minutes, in which the preschool teacher briefly describes the transitioning student as well as consults with the receiving kindergarten teacher (or speech language pathologist in the case of children receiving only speech services). This meeting is typically brief since all transfer consultations usually take place during back-to-back 15-minute meetings on the same day. This brief consultation usually does not provide much time for the preschool and kindergarten staff to discuss the student in an in-depth manner. The researcher consultation for the intervention group was meant to provide the receiving kindergarten staff with more detailed information regarding the student and the student's IEP. Kindergarten staff also had the opportunity to ask specific

questions regarding the student and his or her IEP, as well as any specific concerns relating to the student's behavior or classroom needs. This consultation was specifically designed to allow the kindergarten staff to ask questions regarding the implementation of the student's IEP goals, as well as an opportunity to seek advice regarding who will be responsible for measuring the goals and the student's progress.

Additional supplemental information was gathered regarding the appropriateness of students' kindergarten placements. This information included whether referrals were made for alternative kindergarten placements, any teacher and/or parent comments regarding appropriate placement, and any teachers' requests for consultation regarding academic and social difficulties for individual students. The researcher also documented whether participants maintained their current kindergarten placement or whether any changes in placement were made. Changes in placement could have included transferring to a diagnostic kindergarten or a more restrictive environment if a different placement was warranted based on a student's behavioral or academic needs. For example, a student may be placed in an accommodated behavior cluster setting for students who exhibit challenging behaviors in the classroom setting. Although it is possible that some kindergarten students may demonstrate behavior or academic challenges that were not observed in the previous preschool setting, a student requiring a change in placement may indicate an incomplete transition process in which parent and teacher concerns were not expressed adequately to the receiving kindergarten staff. Additional statements from parents and teachers were also included as a summary of overall thoughts and concerns regarding the kindergarten transition process.

Table 1 further details the transition practices for the intervention group in comparison to already existing school district transition practices (control group). The

Table 1

Transition Practices

School District Transition Practices (Control Group)	Transition Package (Intervention Group)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional Spring open house in preschool providing general information regarding the preschool to kindergarten transition 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Optional Spring open house in preschool providing general information regarding the preschool to kindergarten transition
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> File transfer in Spring between preschool teacher and receiving kindergarten teacher or speech language pathologist 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Spring visit by researcher at parent's home to discuss transition concerns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual file transfer meetings in Spring utilizing conjoint behavior consultation model with researcher (as consultant), parent, preschool teacher, receiving kindergarten teacher, and in some cases, resource teacher, speech language pathologist and/or ancillary staff
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Age-appropriate developmental materials mailed over summer to parents
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Written timeline of transition steps
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher contacts parents by telephone over the summer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Researcher meets with parents in the fall to discuss the kindergarten transition

intervention was conducted within a CBC model that focused on connecting both school and family systems, while increasing communication between home and school settings as well as preschool and kindergarten classrooms. Within this study, the researcher (in the role of school psychologist) acted as the consultant and served as a liaison between preschool and kindergarten teachers (Carlton & Winsler, 1999) in an effort to facilitate the sharing of information regarding individual children and promote a smoother transition process. The consultant also facilitated the implementation of high-intensity transition processes to determine their impact on parent and teacher involvement and parent and teacher perspectives of the kindergarten transition.

This planned transition intervention package was designed to provide preschool and kindergarten staff, along with parents, with sufficient information to make the best decision regarding kindergarten placement for individual children with special needs in order to increase the likelihood of a successful transition experience.

Measures

Parent–Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (PTIQ)

The PTIQ (Kohl, Lengua, & McMahon 2000) is a measure designed to assess the various facets of parent-school partnerships and consists of both parent and teacher report versions. The teacher version of the PTIQ consists of 21 items, which are designed to assess the type and initiation of contact that occurs between parents and teachers, as well as the quality of the parent and teacher relationship. The PTIQ teacher version also measures the parent's level of involvement in the child's school, as well as the teacher's perception of the parent's value of education. Teacher responses on the above items are coded on a 5-point scale, which ranges from 0–4.

The parent version of the PTIQ consists of 26 items that are designed to measure the type and initiation of contact that occurs between parents and teachers, as well as the quality of the relationship between parents and teachers. The parent version measures the level of parental involvement in their child's school, the level of academic involvement in the home, and parents' overall satisfaction with their child's school. This measure is also designed to assess the amount and type of contact that occurs between parent and teachers while comparing both parent and teacher opinions on the level of parental involvement. These items are coded on a 5-point scale, which ranges from 0 to 4 and includes specific frequency ratings ("never," "once or twice a year," "almost every month," "almost every week," "more than once per week"); and general impressions of frequency ("not at all," "a little," "some," "a lot," "a great deal"), as well as level of agreement with statements about school ("strongly disagree," "disagree," "not sure," "agree," "strongly agree").

Parents' and teachers' perceptions of their relationship and their level of involvement served as a dependent variable. Parental involvement was assessed to determine parents' perceptions of their level of overall involvement with their children's school as well as their relationship with their child's teacher. Parents were also asked to provide input regarding their relationships with both their child's preschool teacher in the spring prior to transitioning, as well as their child's kindergarten teacher post-transition in the fall. These ratings were then compared to preschool and kindergarten teachers' own ratings of perceived parental involvement.

Perceptions of Transition

Preschool Transition Survey – Parent Version. For the purpose of measuring parents' perceptions of the preschool transition to kindergarten, the principal investigator developed a survey based on current research in the field relating to important components of the transition process according to parents. The survey provided parents of transitioning preschoolers with the opportunity to indicate how supported they felt during the transition process as well as their level of involvement in the transition process and their overall satisfaction with the preschool to kindergarten transition. Parents were also asked to indicate how informed they were about their child's transition to kindergarten as well as any specific opportunities they were given to ask questions regarding their child's transition to kindergarten. Both parent and teacher transition surveys were adapted from the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition survey developed by McIntyre et al. (2007), which was originally developed for use with typically developing children.

Preschool Transition Survey – Teacher Version. For the purpose of measuring teachers' perceptions of the preschool transition to kindergarten, the principal investigator also developed a survey based on current research in the field relating to important components of the transition process according to teachers. The survey also provided teachers of transitioning preschoolers with the opportunity to indicate how informed they were about the transitioning child as and their specific education needs. Teachers were asked about their level of satisfaction regarding the overall transition process and the level of parental involvement during the transition process.

Individual Child Outcomes

Individual child outcomes were used as a dependent variable and determined by academic performance during the fall and winter of kindergarten. Academic performance was based on student achievement on Curriculum-Based Measures of reading and math as assessed by AIMSweb, a web-based tool for screening and progress monitoring that is regularly administered to all students in the participating school district. Data on AIMSweb were collected in the fall and winter in an effort to demonstrate the influence of transition practices on academic gains as demonstrated by Schulting et al. (2005). Transition practices and their effects on academics have been found in several studies, including Hill (2001), who found that parental involvement served as a factor in children's academic success. Findings by Hill et al. (2004) and Kohl, Lengua, McMahon, and the Conduct Problems Prevention Research Group (2004) suggest that parent-initiated school involvement is positively associated with decreased behavior problems in addition to academic success.

Successful transition outcomes were also used as a dependent variable as evaluated through requests for changes in placement, such as regular kindergarten to a diagnostic kindergarten setting. Although kindergarten teachers and ancillary staff were encouraged to consult with the researcher, data were collected regarding requests for consultation when the questions about behavioral or academic concerns were related to appropriate placement or a potential change in placement. Teachers and parents were also asked in the fall of kindergarten whether they believed their student was placed appropriately in a regular kindergarten setting. Any changes in the kindergarten setting such as a diagnostic kindergarten placement were also noted.

Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). The CBCL (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000) is a rating scale that can be completed by parents, teachers, and students and is designed to assess externalizing and internalizing behaviors, as well as overall total problems of preschool children aged 1 ½ to 5. The CBCL consists of subscales that measure maladaptive behaviors and provides a composite “Total Problems Score” that reflects a child’s overall level of difficulty with problem behaviors and characteristics related to their disability. The CBCL allows parents and teachers to rate children across multiple items that are summarized across subscales, including Emotionally Reactive, Anxious/Depressed, Somatic Complaints, Withdrawn, Sleep Problems (parent rating only), Attention Problems, and Aggressive Behavior. Also included in the ratings are scales corresponding to diagnoses from the American Psychiatric Association’s Diagnostic and Statistical Manual -5 (DSM-5; 2014) such as Affective Problems, Anxiety Problems, Pervasive Developmental Problems, Attention/Hyperactivity Problems, and Oppositional Defiant Problems. CBCL raters also have the option of completing the Language Development Survey (LDS), which uses parents’ reports to assess children’s expressive vocabulary.

The administration of the CBCL form takes approximately 10 to 15 minutes and has 100 items for both parent and teacher versions, as well as additional space for parents and teachers to indicate further concerns or pertinent information. The syndrome scales and overall Externalizing, Internalizing, and Total Problem scales allow the evaluator to determine both parent and teacher concerns regarding a child’s problematic behaviors compared with typically developing children.

According to Rescorla (2005), data collected from parents’ and teachers’ CBCL ratings indicated a high degree of internal consistency, and factor analyses of the measure

indicated that scores on CBCL subscales were consistent with scores on many different instruments measuring child behavior and emotional disorders over several decades of research (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2000). In addition, items that were rated as very consistent with a DSM category by at least 10 of 16 child psychiatrist and psychologist raters (63%) were determined to be sufficiently consistent with DSM categories and were included in the DSM-oriented scales on the CBCL (Rescorla, 2005). For the purpose of this study, which was focused on successful preschool transitions to kindergarten, the CBCL was used to determine a baseline for behavior in preschool and kindergarten as well as a way to demonstrate equivalence between intervention and control groups. The CBCL was completed by different raters at different points in time, preschool teachers in the spring prior to students transitioning to kindergarten and in the fall by kindergarten teachers following students' transitions.

Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS). The SSIS (Elliott & Gresham, 2007) is a rating scale that can be completed by parents, teachers, and students and is designed to measure social skills, problem behaviors, and academic competence for children between the ages of 3 to 18. The SSIS consists of the following scales: Communication, Cooperation, Assertion, Responsibility, Empathy, Engagement, and Self-Control. The Problem Behaviors subscale also measures behavior on the dimensions of Externalizing, Bullying, Hyperactivity/Inattention, Internalizing, and Autism Spectrum. Also included in the SSIS is the Academic Competence subscale, which measures the child's perceptions of competence in the areas of reading achievement, math achievement, and motivation to learn. The administration of the SSIS form takes approximately 15 to 20 minutes and has 83 items for the teacher version and 79 items for the parent version. The Social Skills, Problem Behaviors, and Academic Competence scales allow the evaluator

to determine both parents' and teachers' concerns with social skills and problematic behaviors compared with other children.

According to Flowers (2009), data collected from parents' and teachers' SSIS ratings indicated a high degree of internal consistency, and factor analyses of the measure indicated that scores on the SSIS were consistent with scores on many different social skills scales, including the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS), Behavior Assessment System for Children, Second Edition (BASC-2), Vineland Adaptive Behavior Scales, Second Edition (Vineland-II), Walker-McConnell Scale of Social Competence and School Adjustment (SSCSA), and Home & Community Social Behavior Scales (HCSBS). For the purpose of this study, which focused on successful preschool transitions to kindergarten and child outcomes, the SSIS was used as a post-test administered to kindergarten teachers in the fall as a way to measure the transitioning child's social skills and academic competence after the transition had occurred.

Treatment Acceptability

A Transition Acceptability Rating Scale was also developed by the principal investigator for the purpose of measuring the intervention's acceptability during kindergarten in the fall to assess the opinion of both the parent and the kindergarten teacher. It is important to establish treatment acceptability due to research supporting a link between the adoption of an intervention and its level of acceptability, particularly in the educational setting (Erchul & Sheridan, 2014). The Transition Acceptability Rating Scale was developed based on the Behavior Intervention Rating Scale created by Von Brock and Elliot (1987), which was originally designed to evaluate the influence of treatment effectiveness and acceptability. The Behavior Intervention Rating Scale has

been used in a wide range of studies, including those that examined modeling-coaching treatments (Clark & Elliott, 1988), the acceptability of psychosocial treatments for depression (Miller, DuPaul, & Lutz, 2002), as well as cross-cultural differences in acceptability ratings of classroom treatments for students with an ADHD diagnosis (Pisecco, Huzinec, & Curtis, 2001). The Transition Acceptability Rating Scale was used in the current study to provide documentation of both the parents' and teachers' perceptions of the acceptability of the transition process from preschool to kindergarten to determine if there were differences between the control and intervention groups.

Fidelity

A Consultation Fidelity Checklist was developed by the principal investigator for the purpose of measuring fidelity during the consultation meeting held in the Spring. Research in education has defined the adherence to central components on an intervention as surface fidelity, which can be measured through either direct observation or self-report by the interventionist or researcher (Harn, Parisi, & Stoolmiller, 2013). Within the realm of research, procedural fidelity is necessary to establish a functional relationship between outcomes and an intervention (Barnett et al., 2014). The Consultation Fidelity Checklist was designed to ensure that the facilitator asked about and discussed the concerns of the transitioning child's parent, as well as concerns from the school staff. The Fidelity Checklist also identified if the child's specific IEP goals were discussed during the meeting and how the IEP was to be carried out in the kindergarten setting. The Consultation Fidelity Checklist was developed based on the Needs Identification Interview from the conjoint behavior consultation model outlined by Sheridan and Kratochwill (2007). The Consultation Fidelity Checklist was completed by

the researcher at each file transfer meeting to provide documentation of how well the meeting facilitator followed the intervention protocol during the file transfer meeting. In addition, each kindergarten teacher participating in the file transfer meetings completed the Fidelity Checklist at least once to verify if the facilitator adhered to the outlined structure of the file transfer meeting and to establish inter-rater agreement.

Analyses

Independent samples *t*-tests were used to analyze data from the research questions. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to examine group differences between control and intervention participants on continuous variables such as assessment and survey scores. Specific analyses for each research question were as follows:

1. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between control and intervention group members based on Fall and Winter academic CBM scores.
2. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to compare differences on social skills ratings by kindergarten teachers between participants in the control and intervention groups.
3. Independent samples *t*-tests were conducted to examine differences between the control and intervention groups on scores from the parent version of the PTIQ.
4. Independent samples *t*-tests were also conducted to examine differences between the control and intervention groups on scores from the teacher version of the PTIQ.
5. Independent samples *t*-tests were used to compare differences between the control and intervention groups on scores from the Post-Transition Survey (Parent and

Teacher Versions).

6. Independent samples *t*-tests were also used to compare differences between the control and intervention groups on responses to the Transition Acceptability Rating Scale (Parent and Teacher Versions).

CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Characteristics of Participants

A total of five preschool teachers, 19 kindergarten teachers, six resource teachers, and 22 parents were participants in this study. These participants were based on an original recruited sample of five preschool teachers, 22 kindergarten teachers, eight resource teachers, and 25 parents. Participants who did not return questionnaires after repeated attempts were not included in the final data analyses. All of the preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, resource teachers, and parents who participated were female. Transitioning preschoolers participating in the study included 20 male students and two female students.

Demographic data for the kindergarten teacher participants, who were included in the majority of data analyses, were as follows. Of the 19 kindergarten teachers who participated in the study, the mean age was 40.3, and all kindergarten teachers identified as Caucasian. Kindergarten teachers' years of experience ranged from 1 year of experience to more than 24 years (see Table 2). The sample of kindergarten teachers included 11 kindergarten teachers with bachelor's degrees and eight teachers with master's degrees. In the kindergarten teachers' classrooms, the average number of students was 26.1, and the average number of students with IEPs was 2.2. For the preschool teachers who participated in the study, four were Caucasian and one was

Table 2

Experience of Kindergarten Teacher Participants

Years of Experience	Percent of Teachers ($N = 19$)
0–4 years	Intervention 5.3% ($n = 1$) Control 5.3% ($n = 1$)
4–8 years	Intervention 15.8% ($n = 3$) Control 0% ($n = 0$)
8–12 years	Intervention 19.0% ($n = 4$) Control 10.5% ($n = 2$)
12–16 years	Intervention 5.3% ($n = 1$) Control 0% ($n = 0$)
16–20 years	Intervention 10.5% ($n = 2$) Control 5.3% ($n = 1$)
20–24 years	Intervention 5.3% ($n = 1$) Control 0% ($n = 0$)
24+ years	Intervention 5.3% ($n = 1$) Control 10.5% ($n = 2$)

Hispanic. Teaching experience for preschool teachers ranged from 1-20 years.

Demographic data regarding the students with special needs who were transitioning from preschool to kindergarten in the study were collected via parent report and are detailed in Table 3. All participating parents indicated English was the primary language spoken in their home. Two parents indicated they had other children receiving special education services. Parents were also asked to disclose their transitioning preschooler's current special education classification; these results are found on Table 4. Three parents indicated they had older children who would be attending the same school as their transitioning preschooler.

Table 3

Race/Ethnicity of Student Participants

Race/Ethnicity	Percent of Students ($N = 22$)
Caucasian	Intervention 63.6% ($n = 14$) Control 13.6% ($n = 3$)
Hispanic/Latino	Intervention 0% ($n = 0$) Control 9.1% ($n = 2$)
Asian	Intervention 4.5% ($n = 1$) Control 4.5% ($n = 1$)
Black/African American	Intervention 0% ($n = 0$) Control 4.5% ($n = 1$)

Table 4

Special Education Classification of Student Participants

Classification	Percent of Students ($N = 22$)
Speech/Language Impairment	Intervention 45.5% ($n = 10$) Control 27.3% ($n = 6$)
Developmental Delay	Intervention 18.2% ($n = 4$) Control 4.5% ($n = 1$)
Autism	Intervention 4.5% ($n = 1$) Control 0% ($n = 0$)

Fidelity Checklist

The Consultation Fidelity Checklist was used to measure fidelity during the consultation meeting held in the spring between the preschool and kindergarten teams. The Consultation Fidelity Checklist was designed to ensure that the facilitator discusses the concerns of the transitioning child's parent as well as concerns from the school staff. At the end of each file transfer meeting, each participating kindergarten teacher was asked to complete the Fidelity Checklist at least once to verify if the facilitator adhered to the outlined structure of the file transfer meeting. The facilitator also completed the Consultation Fidelity Checklist on each transitioning child at the file transfer meeting to determine inter-rater agreement. Overall inter-rater agreement was between a 2.38 and 3.00. Scores reflect that all items at least partially occurred during the file transfer meetings. A participant or facilitator endorsement of "3" on an item meant the checklist item occurred, a "2" indicated it partially occurred, and "1" indicated it did not occur. Mean scores by item on the Consultation Fidelity Checklist can be found in Table 5.

Pretransition Screener

The CBCL was used as a pretransition screener as a method of determining a baseline for equivalency between the control and intervention groups. Preschool teachers of students in both the control and intervention groups completed the CBCL and mean composite scores for both groups were compared. Mean scores on the Internalizing Problems composites for the control group and intervention groups are reported in Table 6. A *t*-test on the CBCL Internalizing Problems composite scores prior to transition indicated no significant differences between control and intervention groups: $t(45) = .540, p = .946$. Mean scores for the Externalizing Problems composite for the control and

Table 5

Consultation Fidelity Checklist

Checklist Item	Participant Mean Score	Facilitator Mean Score
1. Discussed the roles of each participant at the meeting and the importance of each participant's contributions	3.00	2.44
2. Stated that everyone's information is vital	2.66	2.38
3. Stated the expertise of each participant involved	2.88	2.50
4. Demonstrated interest in all team members	3.00	2.81
5. Discussed steps of the meeting	2.77	2.38
6. Discussed the child's, family's, and teacher's strengths	2.88	2.94
7. Discussed parents' goals and desires for the child	3.00	2.94
8. Discussed preschool teacher's concerns for the transitioning student	3.00	2.94
9. Discussed parents' concerns for the transitioning child	3.00	2.94
10. Discussed how the transitioning child's IEP goals will be served in the kindergarten setting	2.77	2.88

Table 6

CBCL Internalizing Composite Scores Pre- and Post-Transition

	Pretransition	Post transition
Control Group ($n = 6$)	$M = 46.83$ ($SD = 11.034$)	$M = 51.25$ ($SD = 12.038$)
Intervention Group ($n = 14$)	$M = 52.35$ ($SD = 7.492$)	$M = 52.36$ ($SD = 13.713$)

intervention groups are reported in Table 7, Total Problem composites for control and intervention groups are found in Table 8. A t -test on the CBCL Externalizing Problems composite scores prior to transition indicated no significant differences between groups: $t(45) = -1.537, p = .131$. On the overall Total Problems composite, a t -test comparing both group mean scores indicated no significant differences: $t(45) = -.986, p = .329$.

Research Question 1: Parent Perceptions of School Involvement

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parents' perceptions of their school involvement as measured by the PTIQ–Parent Version?

Parent ratings on the PTIQ were examined between the control and intervention groups. Parent participants were asked to rate their level of involvement with their child's preschool teacher prior to the kindergarten transition as well as their relationship with their child's kindergarten teacher after the transition occurred (see Table 9). Overall, based on t -tests comparing control and intervention groups, there were no significant differences between parents' ratings of their involvement in preschool, $t(25) = -1.117, p = .275$, or parents' ratings of their involvement in kindergarten, $t(12) = .665, p = .518$.

Table 7

CBCL Externalizing Composite Scores Pre- and Post-Transition

	Pre-Transition	Post-Transition
Control Group ($n = 6$)	$M = 46.83$ ($SD = 11.034$)	$M = 51.25$ ($SD = 12.038$)
Intervention Group ($n = 14$)	$M = 52.35$ ($SD = 7.492$)	$M = 52.36$ ($SD = 13.713$)

Table 8

CBCL Total Problems Composite Scores Pre- and Post-Transition

	Pre-Transition	Post-Transition
Control Group ($n = 6$)	$M = 47.50$ ($SD = 8.619$)	$M = 52.00$ ($SD = 10.099$)
Intervention Group ($n = 14$)	$M = 53.85$ ($SD = 4.452$)	$M = 55.363$ ($SD = 12.909$)

Table 9

Parent Ratings of Involvement on the PTIQ

	Pre-Transition	Post-Transition
Control Group	$M = 29.308$ ($SD = 6.342$) $n = 13$	$M = 30.666$ ($SD = 3.872$) $n = 9$
Intervention Group	$M = 31.785$ ($SD = 5.161$) $n = 14$	$M = 29.000$ ($SD = 5.522$) $n = 5$

Research Question 2: Teacher Perceptions of School Involvement

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact teachers' perceptions of parents' school involvement as measured by the PTIQ–Teacher version?

Teacher ratings on the PTIQ were compared between the control and intervention groups. Preschool and kindergarten teachers were asked to rate their level of involvement with the parents of their students. In the case of preschool teachers this occurred prior to the transition to kindergarten, while for kindergarten teachers this occurred in the Fall after the students had already transitioned. These scores can be found in Table 10.

Analyses indicated no significant differences between control and intervention groups on preschool teachers' ratings of parent involvement, $t(33) = .095$, $p = .097$, or on kindergarten teachers' ratings of parent involvement, $t(17) = .095$, $p = 3.169$.

Table 10

Teacher Ratings of Involvement on the PTIQ

	Pre-Transition (Preschool Teachers)	Post-Transition (Kindergarten Teachers)
Control Group	$M = 15.667$ ($SD = 2.955$) $n = 21$	$M = 17.285$ ($SD = 3.147$) $n = 7$
Intervention Group	$M = 15.571$ ($SD = 2.793$) $n = 14$	$M = 17.166$ ($SD = 2.329$) $n = 12$

Research Question 3: Parent/Teacher Perceptions of Transition Success

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parent and/or teacher perceptions of the success of the transition to kindergarten?

Differences in scores on the Parent and Teacher versions of the Preschool Transition Survey were examined between both control and intervention groups. Both parents of preschoolers who transitioned to kindergarten and kindergarten teachers were asked to rate their opinions of the supports provided during the transition to kindergarten as well as the individual student's level of school readiness. Parents who completed the Preschool Transition Survey also were asked questions pertaining to their level of concerns for their child as they transitioned to kindergarten, their opinion of the preschool program's efforts to inform parents during the transition process (transition planning), their involvement during the transition, and the preschool's involvement during the transition. There were no significant differences between the control and intervention groups on parent ratings of concerns for their transitioning preschooler, $t(8) = .591$, $p = .571$, helpfulness of the transition strategies provided, $t(13) = .940$, $p = .364$, parent

involvement during the transition, $t(13) = .044, p = .966$, or the school's involvement with the transition process, $t(13) = .623, p = .544$.

Analysis of the Teacher version of the Preschool Transition Survey, which was completed by kindergarten teachers and/or resource teacher post-transition revealed no significant differences on ongoing concerns for students, $t(12) = -1.270, p = .228$, helpful transition planning strategies, $t(13) = .673, p = .513$, perceptions of students' progress, $t(15) = -1.545, p = .143$, or perceptions of parental involvement, $t(13) = 1.140, p = .275$.

Research Question 4: Parent/Teacher Acceptability

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact parents' and/or teachers' acceptability of transition strategies?

Differences in scores on the Transition Acceptability Rating Scale completed by kindergarten teachers and parents were compared between the control and intervention groups (see Table 11). On parent ratings of transition acceptability there were no significant differences between groups: $t(13) = -.746, p = .469$. Kindergarten teacher ratings also indicated no significant differences between groups: $t(9) = 1.109, p = .296$. As a supplemental measure, kindergarten resource teachers and speech language pathologists also completed the Transition Acceptability Rating Scale for participating students in the intervention group. Although t -test comparisons with a control group were not possible, respondent ratings resulted in the following scores ($M = 39.833, SD = 11.409$). These scores were higher than those of kindergarten teachers of students in the intervention group ($M = 26.571, SD = 9.829$) and only slightly higher than parent ratings of the same students ($M = 36.666, SD = 11.977$).

Table 11

Transition Acceptability Survey Ratings for Intervention Group by Respondents

Transition Acceptability Survey Ratings	
Kindergarten Resource Teachers and Speech Language Pathologists ($n = 6$)	$M = 39.833$ ($SD = 11.409$)
Kindergarten Teachers ($n = 7$)	$M = 26.571$ ($SD = 9.829$)
Parents ($n = 15$)	$M = 36.666$ ($SD = 11.977$)

Research Question 5: Social Skills Outcomes

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact child social skills outcomes as measured by the SSIS?

Differences in SSIS scores were examined between both control and intervention groups across three SSIS composite scores of Social Skills (SS): Problem Behaviors (PB), and Academic Competency (AC) as rated by the receiving kindergarten teachers. Data were only collected for students during the beginning of the kindergarten year for kindergarten teachers who agreed to participate in the current study (see Table 12). *T*-tests between the control and intervention groups indicated no significant differences on the Social Skills composite, $t(16) = -.032$, $p = .975$, or the Problem Behaviors composite, $t(16) = -.255$, $p = .802$. On the Academic Competency composite, there was a significant difference between groups: $t(16) = 2.893$, $p = .011$, with kindergarten teachers rating the control group substantially higher ($M = 103.67$, $SD = 11.12$) than the intervention group ($M = 87.08$, $SD = 3.352$).

Table 12

Composite SSIS Scores Across Groups

	Control Group ($n = 6$)	Intervention Group ($n = 12$)
Social Skills	$M = 92.33$ ($SD = 17.851$)	$M = 92.58$ ($SD = 4.298$)
Problem Behaviors	$M = 103.33$ ($SD = 12.565$)	$M = 105.50$ ($SD = 18.652$)
Academic Competency	$M = 103.67$ ($SD = 11.130$)	$M = 87.08$ ($SD = 3.352$)

Research Question 6: Academic Outcomes

Do enhanced kindergarten transition practices positively impact child academic outcomes in reading and/or mathematics on CBM measures on Fall or Winter benchmarking assessments as measured by AIMSweb?

Differences in AIMSweb scores were examined between both control and intervention groups using general linear modeling. AIMSweb data were collected in Fall and Winter on measures of First Sound Fluency (FSF) and Quantity Discrimination (QDM), which are both considered emerging academic skills for kindergartners. The FSF measure results in a score reflecting correct number of initial sounds of words per minute, and the QDM measure results in a score reflecting correct number of discriminated quantities of numbers. Although participants in the intervention group started out lower on Fall FSF measures than control participants, both groups made growth on Winter FSF benchmarks, and data on academic assessments were only collected for participants remaining in the current study during the beginning of the kindergarten year (see Table 13). A t -test between groups on gains in scores indicated no significant differences, $t(1) =$

Table 13

Participant Scores on First Sound Fluency (FSF) CBM Measures

	FSF (Fall)	FSF (Winter)
Control Group	$M = 17.50$ ($SD = 13.599$) $n = 10$	$M = 32.40$ ($SD = 10.946$) $n = 10$
Intervention Group	$M = 5.79$ ($SD = 8.154$) $n = 15$	$M = 25.86$ ($SD = 24.667$) $n = 15$

.574, $p = .457$. As seen in Figure 1, there also was no significant interaction between test time and group type.

AIMSweb data taken in the Fall and Winter indicated slightly higher scores on QDM in both the Fall and Winter for the intervention group compared to the control group in the Fall and Winter (see Table 14). Similar to FSF, both control and intervention participants made gains on their QDM scores between Fall and Winter. Although there were slight differences between groups, these differences on gains in scores were not significant: $t(1) = .035$, $p = .854$. Figure 2 illustrates no significant interaction between test time and group type.

Supplemental Information

Home visits and telephone calls with parents in the intervention group took place the first week of August, about 3 weeks before the beginning of kindergarten. During these visits and phone calls parents were asked if they had questions over the materials that were sent to them as well as any other concerns they had regarding the start of the kindergarten school year. Three parent participants indicated they had questions about school fees, registration, and other general administration or enrollment questions. In

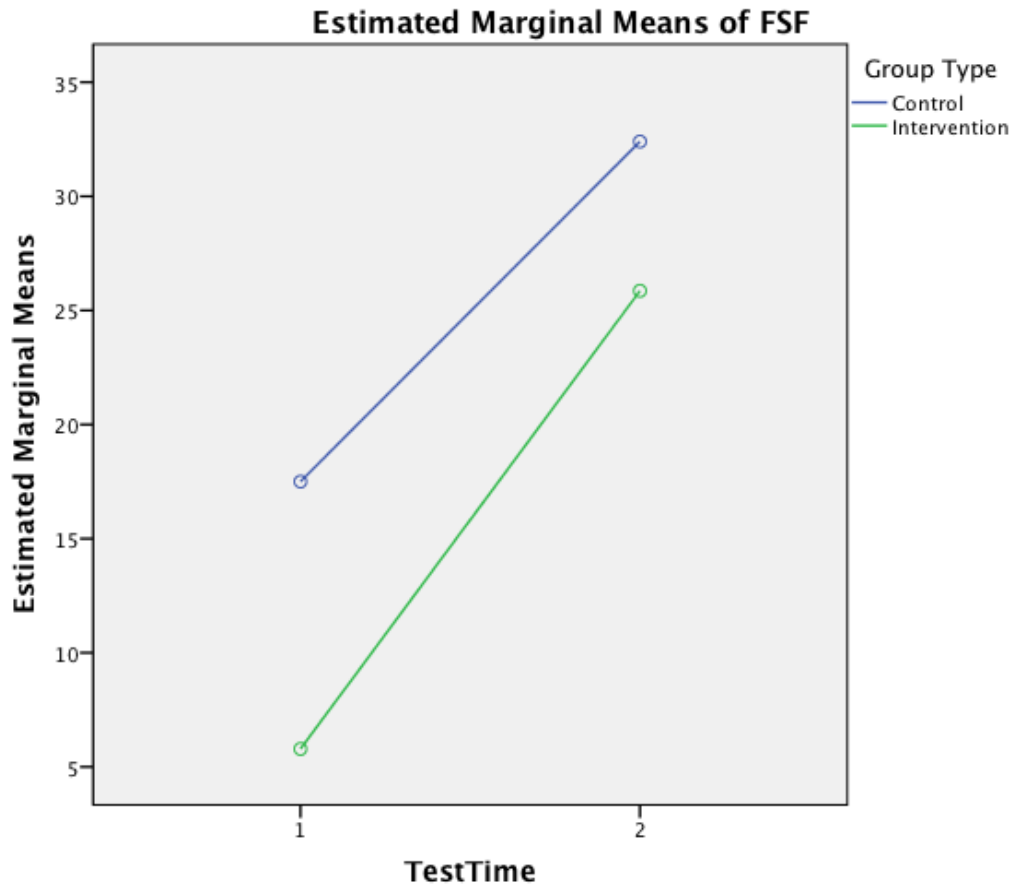


Figure 1: First Sound Fluency (FSF) Data Between Groups

Table 14

Participant Scores on Quantity Discrimination (QDM) CBM Measures

	QDM (Fall)	QDM (Winter)
Control Group	$M = 7.00$ ($SD = 7.409$) $n = 10$	$M = 18.70$ ($SD = 10.965$) $n = 10$
Intervention Group	$M = 8.93$ ($SD = 7.631$) $n = 15$	$M = 19.71$ ($SD = 13.991$) $n = 15$

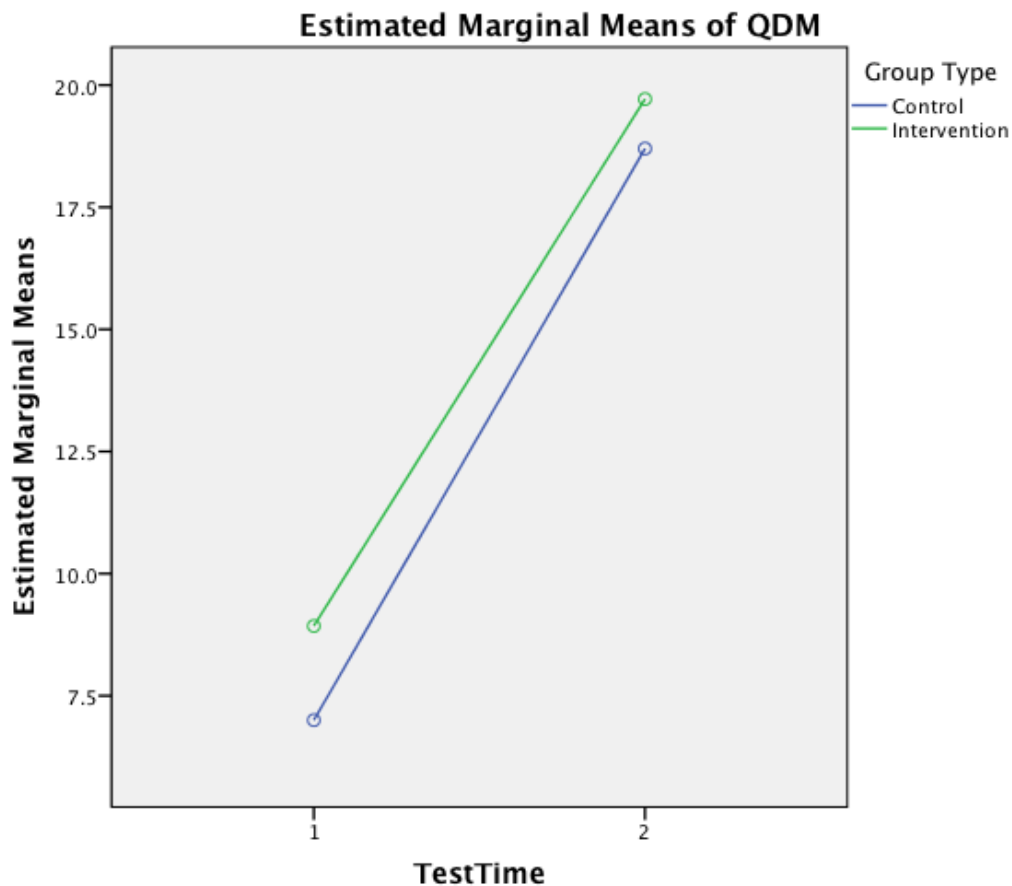


Figure 2. Quantity Discrimination (QDM) Data Between Groups

these situations parents were given the office telephone number of their child's receiving elementary school in order to obtain information regarding overall school administration. In one situation a parent had concerns regarding her child's readiness for kindergarten. This conversation covered questions she had regarding the information on developmental milestones she was sent over the summer as well as her child's ability to meet those milestones. The researcher was able to relay to the parent that her child would most likely be ready for kindergarten, given her child's progress so far in preschool and her child's need for special education for a mild speech delay. In another situation a parent indicated she was considering holding her child out of kindergarten due to the child's late summer

birthday. The researcher discussed the pros and cons of delaying her child's entry to kindergarten for a year and the parent ultimately decided against sending her child on to kindergarten.

Information gathered during home visits conducted with parents in the intervention group prior to the preschool to kindergarten transition was analyzed qualitatively. These home visits served as opportunities for parents to discuss their specific concerns for their child as they prepared for their child's transition to kindergarten as well as a means to facilitate their involvement in the transition process. These home visits also provided parents with the ability to respond to open-ended questions about their child's strengths and weaknesses as well as their concerns. Home visits have been frequently described a positive transition strategy that aims to establish links with families prior to the first day of kindergarten (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999).

During these home visits, parents in the intervention group were given the opportunity to provide the researcher with information about their child, which would later be shared with the receiving kindergarten team. This information was structured to reflect topic areas included on the Information About My Child from the Terrific Transitions program (SERVE, 2004). Statements included

- 1) These things please me most about my child
- 2) Right now, I am most concerned about...
- 3) I think these services would help my child
- 4) These are things my child does well
- 5) I would like my child to learn to do these things
- 6) Our family could also use help with...

- 7) My child really likes...
- 8) My child learns best when...
- 9) I would like to be involved in my child's program in these ways

Parent responses were categorized by individual statement and were condensed into general themes with frequencies as reported in Table 15. The themes describe parental concerns about their child as well as their individual strengths. Overall the information obtained during home visits indicated that parents had a wide variety of concerns for their children as they prepared for the transition from preschool to kindergarten. Their concerns about kindergarten transition are in line with the results of an earlier survey of parents of transitioning preschoolers that found 80% of respondents wanted more information about academic expectations while 68% wanted to know more about what they could be doing to help prepare their child for kindergarten transition (McIntyre et al., 2007). In addition to providing information about areas of concern for their child, parents were also given the opportunity to provide the researcher with details about what their child's strengths.

Parents indicated being pleased most with their child's personality ($n = 11$), their ability to work hard ($n = 3$), their behavior ($n = 4$), and their preacademic skills ($n = 1$). In addition, parents indicated that they felt their child did well in many different skills critical to success in kindergarten, adaptive/independent living skills ($n = 8$), letter concepts ($n = 5$), number concepts ($n = 1$), problem solving ($n = 1$), social skills ($n = 2$), and art ($n = 1$). It can be helpful to encourage parents to highlight the strengths of their child when addressing parent concerns in order to portray the information sharing process from a strengths-based approach.

Given that previous studies have found heightened concerns for students with

Table 15

Distribution of Statements Endorsed by Parents in Intervention Group (N = 15)

Statement	Themes	Frequency
These things please me most about my child	Personality	11
	Behavior	4
	Hard worker	3
	Academics	1
Right now I am most concerned about	Communication/Speech	6
	Behavior	4
	Academics	4
	Child getting left behind	2
	Social skills	2
	Motor skills	1
	No concerns	1
I think these services would help my child	Communication/Speech	12
	School psychologist consultation services	6
	Small group instruction	2
	Motor skills	1
These are things my child does well	Adaptive/Independence	8
	Letter concepts	5
	Social skills	2
	Math concepts	1
	Problem solving	1
	Art	1
I would like my child to learn to do these things	Read/Write	9
	Communicate	6
	Socialize	3
	Number concepts	2
	Adaptive/Independence	2

Table 15 Continued

Distribution of Statements Endorsed by Parents in Intervention Group (N = 15)

Statement	Themes	Frequency
My family could also use help with	No additional help	7
	Creating a routine at home	3
	More communication with kindergarten team	2
	Improving social skills	1
	Family stress	1
My child learns best when	Through play	8
	Self-guided	5
	With a supportive adult	4
	Through repetition	1
	Opportunities to help	1
I would like to be involved in my child's program in these ways	Positive reinforcement	1
	Volunteering	10
	Contact from kindergarten team about child	5

special needs transitioning to kindergarten among parents, this may be indicative of parents' belief that their students are at greater risk for inefficient transitions (McIntyre et al., 2007). The concerns shared by parents during home visits in the current study appeared to validate these risks. Concerns voiced by parents during home visits included behavior ($n = 4$), communication/speech ($n = 6$), child getting left behind ($n = 2$), social skills, motor skills ($n = 1$), and academics ($n = 4$), with only one parent indicating no concerns. The majority of concerns shared by parents were related to kindergarten/school readiness skills. McIntyre et al. (2007) also found that parents were most concerned about behavior, academic skills, socialization with peers, and the ability to follow instructions.

One parent participant summarized her concerns with the following statement:

“I’m worried about Andrew handling academic demands as he gets older.”

Many parents also expressed worries about their child’s ability to communicate and made statements such as,

I’m worried Brian’s speech will be hard to understand and he may get frustrated when he’s trying to communicate with others. I’m also worried his speech may get in the way of making friends.

Parents most often indicated being concerned with their child’s behavior and social skills.

A common theme reported by participating parents was a desire for their children to be accepted and to fit in with their peers.

Given the frequent report of concerns regarding social skills and behavior, several parents were encouraged by the researcher to seek a consultation with their child’s school psychologist ($n = 6$) during kindergarten if their behavior and social skills concerns persisted. Other services that parents indicated might be helpful during kindergarten included communication/speech services ($n = 12$), small group instruction ($n = 2$), and help with motor skills ($n = 1$). In almost all cases where parents indicated that

communication and speech services was a need, their children were already receiving speech services on an IEP during preschool with the expectation that these services would continue into kindergarten.

When asked to indicate which skills they felt were most important for their child to learn during kindergarten, the majority of parents' responses included: the ability to socialize well with their peers ($n = 3$), effective communication ($n = 6$), the ability to read and write ($n = 9$), learn number concepts ($n = 2$), and adaptive/independent skills ($n = 2$). Preschoolers face increased academic demands and expectations for social skills during the kindergarten school year (Ladd, 1990; Love et al., 1990), so the skills that parent participants identified as critical are those necessary for school success.

During the home visits parents were also asked to share how they felt their child learned best. Parent participants indicated their child learned best through play ($n = 8$), self-guided learning ($n = 5$), with a supportive adult ($n = 4$), through repetition ($n = 1$), opportunities to help ($n = 1$), and positive reinforcement ($n = 1$). Parents often reported their child learned best when tasks were enjoyable and novel for their child. An example of how parents perceived their child learning best included the following statement:

He learns best in action, when he's able to do things on his own. He would also do well with warm and caring adults.

In keeping with research that suggests parental efficacy in managing school transitions supports positive social adjustment outcomes for children, parents were also asked if they felt as though they needed additional supports during the transition process. Some of the ideas for needed support that were shared during the home visits included more communication with the kindergarten team prior to the beginning of the school year ($n = 2$), strategies for home to improve social skills ($n = 1$), and creating a routine at

home ($n = 3$), and managing family stress ($n = 1$). Interestingly, several parents reported they needed no additional support during the transition from preschool to kindergarten ($n = 7$). In those situations where parents indicated they needed support with implementing a routine at home or improving social skills, the researcher shared strategies with the families and encouraged parents to seek out their child's preschool teacher in order to determine which strategies worked well for their child in the school setting. During the course of the home visit, one family who indicated they were experiencing stress relating to family issues was referred to the district's Canyons Family Center in order to schedule an intake appointment with a school psychologist to determine if counseling services or parenting classes were warranted.

During the home visits parents often inquired about their ability to volunteer in their child's kindergarten classroom and several parents indicated that they would be seeking out volunteer opportunities ($n = 10$) during the upcoming school year. Another theme that arose when parents were asked how they would like to be involved in their child's kindergarten program was the desire to have frequent contact and communication ($n = 5$) with their child's teacher as to their child's progress in the classroom. The ability to volunteer in their children's kindergarten classroom and maintain meaningful contact with the teacher may contribute to parents' overall perceptions of the transition process. These parental perceptions and attitudes may impact their child's own adjustment to school and if those perceptions are positive, could contribute to a more positive experience (Giallo, Treyvaud, Matthews, & Kienhuis, 2010). Overall, parents in the intervention group were extremely accommodating and open to receiving a home visit from the researcher to discuss their concerns regarding the upcoming transition. The majority of parents seemed to have only a limited number of concerns regarding the

upcoming kindergarten school year. Parents were also reminded to contact the researcher at the beginning of kindergarten if they had any lingering academic, social, or IEP concerns for their child. Although this offer was extended, the researcher was not contacted by any parents in the intervention group after the beginning of kindergarten school year.

Follow up Visits and Telephone Calls

In addition to addressing parents' concerns prior to the transition from preschool to kindergarten, supplemental data also were collected on any concerns or issues that arose after the transition had already occurred. These issues came to light primarily through parent feedback on the Preschool Transition Survey administered post-transition. A summary of ongoing concerns brought up during the follow up visits and telephone calls is described below.

Based on the results of the post-transition administration of the Preschool Transition Survey-Parent Version, parents reported additional concerns that arose for their children as they transitioned from preschool to kindergarten. In addition, this information was also collected for participants in the intervention group via follow-up post-transition home visits with four families, five follow-up telephone calls, and one classroom consultation with a receiving kindergarten teacher and resource teacher. There were two open-ended questions contained in the Preschool Transition Survey-Parent Version that was administered post-transition:

- 1) What were the primary issues for your child as he/she transitioned to kindergarten?
- 2) Are any of the above issues still a problem?

The analysis of responses to these questions yielded two categories of concerns: pretransition concerns and ongoing issues.

Parent responses to these questions are organized by category, second by area of concern, and lastly how much parents perceived the problem to be ongoing (see Table 15). These responses reflect unique parent concerns as well as individual experiences throughout the transition process. In some cases, direct quotes from parent participants are used to personalize family transition experiences.

Although methods exist for determining the frequency of qualitative responses throughout a sample (Hill et al., 2005) due to the small sample size included in this study they will only be addressed descriptively.

Characteristics of Parent Concerns

Several common concerns arose for parents prior to the preschool to kindergarten transition for both control group and intervention group participants and can be found in Table 16. These included concerns about behavior, speech, academics, attention, social skills, and a desire to meet with the kindergarten receiving team prior to the transition. Of parents who reported ongoing concerns after the transition had already occurred, parent participants from both groups reported concerns about their child's behavior, attention, communication/speech, social skills, academics, and feeling as though the kindergarten team was not aware of their child's IEP. At least one parent in the control group also reported ongoing concerns with social skills.

Behavior was listed as a concern prior to the transition by parents in the control group ($n = 2$) and intervention group ($n = 2$) and as an ongoing concern in the control

Table 16

Distribution of Open-Ended Responses Completed by Parents (N=15)

		Frequency	
		Control <i>n</i> = 8	Intervention <i>n</i> = 7
Pre-Transition Concerns	Behavior	2	2
	Communication/Speech	2	1
	Academics	2	2
	Attention	1	1
	Social Skills	1	1
	Meet Kdg staff before transition	1	1
Post-Transition Ongoing Concerns	Behavior	1	2
	Communication/Speech	1	1
	Academics	1	0
	Attention	1	1
	Social Skills	1	1
	Kdg staff not aware of IEP services	2	1
Degree to Which Concerns Continue	Definitely	0	1
	Somewhat	5	2
	Not at all	2	4

group ($n = 1$) and in the intervention group ($n = 2$). In the control group one parent indicated that her child's difficulties with behavior prevented her child from participating fully in the classroom setting. From the intervention group, one parent of a student with ongoing behavioral concerns indicated that although her child's behavior had improved, her child had a few incidences of aggression and violent speech in the school setting, and this was a definite ongoing concern for her. Another parent from the intervention group who initially had behavior concerns for her child prior to the transition indicated that behavior was no longer a concern for her post-transition. She detailed her child's

experience post-transition with the following statement (names were changed to protect identity):

Mrs. Banks told me that he is doing very well. She has set clear boundaries/rules for him and he follows them. She said the first 3 days of school were a little rough but Steven hasn't had any problems since then...

My neighbors, friends, and family have also told me that Steven's behavior has improved a lot. Although Steven is doing good at school, he sometimes still acts up at home. The most important thing to me though is that he is doing well in school.

Communication/Speech was listed as a concern prior to the transition by parents in the control group ($n = 2$) and in the intervention group ($n = 1$). As a post-transition concern, communication and speech was indicated by one parent in the control group ($n = 1$) and also was indicated as an ongoing concern by one parent in the intervention group ($n = 1$). The parent in the control who indicated communication/speech as an ongoing concern stated she was still somewhat concerned with her child's ability to communicate with peers and the teacher. The parent in the intervention group also indicated she continued to be concerned with how her child's speech difficulties might affect socialization with peers as well as grasp academic concepts; however, this parent also indicated she was very pleased with her child's kindergarten staff and felt as though they worked well with her child's speech issues.

Academic issues were also a common concern among parents in both the control ($n = 2$) and intervention ($n = 1$) groups prior to the preschool to kindergarten transition. Post-transition, only one parent in the control group reported ongoing academic concerns. The parent in the control group who reported being somewhat concerned with her child's academic progress indicated that she wished she had been able to meet with the kindergarten staff before her child started the school year.

Issues with attention were also reported between both the control ($n = 1$) and intervention ($n = 2$) groups prior to the preschool to kindergarten transition. Attention continued to be a concern for a couple of parents after the transition to kindergarten in both the control ($n = 1$) and intervention ($n = 1$) groups. The parent from the control group who indicated her child's ability to pay attention in the classroom was still somewhat of a concern for her made the following comment: He isn't used to sitting at a desk and he has a hard time paying attention to his work.

Concerns with social skills prior to transition also occurred in both the control ($n = 1$) and intervention ($n = 1$) groups prior to the transition. These concerns persisted in the control group for one parent ($n = 1$) and another parent in the intervention group ($n = 1$) after the transition to kindergarten.

Parents in both groups also reported wanting to meet with the kindergarten staff prior to the start of the school year in both the control ($n = 1$) and intervention groups ($n = 1$). In the case of the control group, the parent who indicated a desire to meet with the school team felt as though it would have been beneficial to meet with the special education teacher prior to the transition in order to share specific concerns regarding her child. Although the parent from the intervention group attended a file transfer meeting (facilitated by the researcher) where she met her child's speech language pathologist ahead of time, she still felt as though it would have been beneficial to meet her child's kindergarten teacher prior to starting school. This issue will be discussed later in greater depth, but in the case of this student, this specific school did not compile a kindergarten class list until mid- to late summer. This practice made it impossible to facilitate a meeting prior to the start of the school year given the fact that at the time of the study, it was unknown who this child's actual teacher would be.

Although the practice of developing kindergarten class lists early has been discussed frequently in the early childhood transition literature (Pianta et al., 1999; Stormont, Beckner, Mitchell, & Richter, 2005) it remains a rarely implemented practice. This issue highlights an overall concern regarding the lack of continuity between preschool and kindergarten that some students and their families face. In many situations families report feeling as though kindergarten is an afterthought for school administrators, and this perception is perpetuated when parents are unable to direct their concerns to their child's receiving teacher. Additional research in this area has suggested these issues may be further compounded by administrators' overall opinions of students with disabilities, as well as their perceptions of the importance of school transitions (Praisner, 2003).

One of the last issues parents brought up in both groups (control = 2, intervention = 1) were parent reports of kindergarten school teams not being aware of their child's IEP or need for special education services. In the case of the control group, both parents stated that the kindergarten staff was completely unaware of their child's IEP, and they had to call to make sure their children were receiving special education services. One parent indicated that although her child transitioned well to kindergarten, she was disappointed by the kindergarten receiving team:

As a parent I was frustrated that I wasn't contacted by his new speech language pathologist at the very least to confirm she had received his file from preschool and when and how often she would begin services.

These sentiments were also echoed by another parent in the control group who was frustrated by the kindergarten team's lack of communication with her regarding her child: "The school didn't initially seem to know what to do with him or his IEP."

In the case of both of these students, their files were transferred to the receiving kindergarten team; current procedures are that the receiving special education teacher and/or related services provider would inform the kindergarten teacher and commence special education services in the Fall. Special education teachers and related service providers in the intervention group were then expected to relay this information to their school teams, but they also had the advantage of having the parents at the file transfer meeting so they were able to meet with them ahead of time. This meeting between parents and special education teachers and/or related service providers was part of the intervention and was intended to give parents the opportunity to share their concerns with the school team prior to the beginning of the school year. This meeting also stemmed from research indicating smoother transitions occurred from preschool to kindergarten when a distinct committee or person has been designated to facilitate the transition (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) and delineate roles and responsibilities between preschool and kindergarten teams (Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holborn, 1990; Fowler, Schwartz, & Atwater, 1991).

In the case of the one parent from the intervention group who indicated problems with her child's IEP, she chose not to attend the file transfer meeting in the spring. This may have impacted her relationship with the school staff and later contributed to the difficulties she experienced. Her comments regarding her concerns post-preschool to kindergarten transition are summarized below:

The kindergarten teacher and principal did not understand Boston's needs and they did not know he had an active IEP. This was very concerning and I had to contact the district and have them get involved in order for him to receive services.

Although this parent's experience is concerning, it should also be noted that the researcher spoke with this parent during a follow-up telephone call post-transition which was made to all parents in the intervention group. The researcher was notified of the difficulties experienced at her child's school, and the researcher offered to contact the special education teacher in order to help facilitate any ambiguity regarding her child's services. The parent did not act upon this offer, so there is some ambiguity regarding this parent's experience and the level of communication, which actually took place between her and the receiving school team.

Two parents in the intervention group indicated that they believed their student experienced a smooth and efficient transition from preschool to kindergarten. The parents who indicated having the best transition experiences took part in all phases of the planned intervention including home visits, attending the file transfer meeting, and participating in post-transition follow-up telephone calls placed by the researcher. This participation by parents supports research that suggests "caregivers can work with school staff as partners in the education of their children" while assisting "with the transition process by becoming an equal partner in decision making and establishing open communication systems across settings" (Adams & Christenson, 2000; McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2006, p. 358; Pianta et al., 2001).

CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

While many parents often face school transitions with hesitation, the preschool to kindergarten transition in particular can produce a period of disruption for many children and families. The preschool to kindergarten transition often includes anticipation of changes in services and providers, and in some cases, a complete change in setting. Research has suggested this is especially true for preschool students with disabilities receiving services under an Individualized Education Program (IEP). Previous research has also indicated that parents of children with disabilities often report receiving little information regarding the transition process and few chances to provide teachers with their input and concerns throughout the transition process. This is particularly problematic, given the current research that suggests children who experience inefficient transitions from preschool to kindergarten are often characterized as being less prepared for kindergarten in regards to their academic and social skills. Although parents may naturally continue to have some worries for their children with special needs as they transition from preschool to kindergarten, the receiving kindergarten team can help to facilitate an open and informative relationship with parents. A positive relationship with school-based staff, especially those providing special education services, can considerably decrease parental concerns for students transitioning to kindergarten. The importance of alleviating parental concerns has been demonstrated through “adequate

planning and preparation, both before and after the student transitions” while supporting students as they “negotiate the heightened school demands and foster and maintain strong collaborative partnerships with families” (McIntyre et al., 2010, p. 263). This study sought to investigate an enhanced kindergarten transition practice for preschoolers with special needs by examining the impact on parent-teacher perception of transition success, parent involvement in school, and child outcomes as a result of the enhanced transition process.

Recent studies have begun to suggest that preschool students with disabilities who have experienced inefficient transitions to kindergarten and are perceived as less academically and socially prepared by their kindergarten teachers continue to be perceived as less prepared for school by their future teachers. This issue is becoming more widely recognized and has begun to be highlighted in a variety of transition-related materials, including *Terrific Transitions* (SERVE, 2004) and *First 5* (Hand, 2004), which both seek to improve the ability of families, schools, and communities to prepare students for school. Previous research has looked at transition strategies that contribute to school readiness for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten, as well as the effects of inefficient transition strategies. The current study is the first study to comprehensively examine differences in transition strategies and the resulting perceptions of these strategies by teachers and parents while accounting for the effects of those strategies on the academic and social outcomes of students.

Enhanced Transition Practices and Academic
and Social Outcomes

The results of the current study indicate that transition practices did not appear to have a significant effect on child academic outcomes as measured by curriculum-based measures (CBM) of First Sound Fluency (FSF) and Quantity Discrimination (QDM) (AIMSweb). In regards to FSF, students in the control group as a whole outperformed students in the intervention group at both the Fall and Winter benchmarks. Both groups made gains between Fall and Winter benchmarks, with the intervention group as a whole making slightly higher gains than the control group. On the QDM measure, the intervention group started out with a slightly higher overall mean at the Fall benchmark, but both groups made approximately equivalent gains from Fall to Winter benchmarks. These findings contradict previous research that found increased academic gains associated with enriched transition practices (Schulting et al., 2005). It is important to note that this previous research used a much larger sample size and assessed academic gains across the entire kindergarten school year. The difference in outcomes between the present study and previous research may be due to the small sample size in the present study, as well as to the narrow timeframe between benchmarking periods (Fall to Winter). End-of-year benchmarking scores in the Spring would have been ideal to ascertain any group differences in academic outcomes; however, the benchmarking measures change at the Spring benchmark, which eliminated the possibility of Fall to Spring growth comparisons. It is possible that a longer timeframe between measures and/or a larger sample size may have produced different results in assessed academic growth that was more in line with previous research.

The current study also examined the effects of transition strategies on social outcomes for children as rated by their kindergarten teachers in the Fall. Data from the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) indicated no significant differences between groups on the Social Skills Composite or Problem Behaviors Composite scores. It is clear from the research involving preschool to kindergarten transitions that behavior can have a negative effect on a student's transition to kindergarten. Research has even indicated that elementary school principals feel the least prepared to serve students with problem behaviors (Brotherson, Sheriff, Milburn, & Schertz, 2001). Additional studies have also shown that social skills are rated as more important by teachers than academic readiness skills when determining student success in kindergarten (Graue, 2000; Piotrowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000).

On the SSIS, there was a significant difference on the Academic Competence Composite between groups, with the students in the control group rated significantly higher than the intervention group. Although this finding was unexpected it is important to note that the kindergarten teachers in the control group had a generally low rate of return for completed surveys (6 out of 10), which contributed to a small sample size of students in the control group on this outcome measure. Also due to the small sample size, an outlier within the control group may have contributed to higher overall academic competency ratings. It is possible that specific students in the control may have had higher scores on the First Sound Fluency portion of CBM measures, which would also explain the control group's overall higher performance on First Sound Fluency when compared to the intervention group. In addition, some of these participating students were in the same kindergarten classroom, which increases the likelihood of the influence of potential bias on the part of an individual teacher toward multiple students in his or her

own class. It is possible that a teacher assigned similar scores to multiple children who were rated, without discriminating between students with lower and higher skills within his or her own classroom (Englehard, 2002). This type of bias in student ratings can potentially influence teachers' overall judgments of students and their abilities, which previous research has found to have consequences for teachers' instructional practice, future evaluation of students' performances, placement decisions, and various instructional decisions (Alvidrez & Weinstein, 1999; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Hoge, 1983; Hoge & Coladarci, 1989; Sudkamp, Kaiser, & Moller, 2012). The potential for this type of bias was heightened due to the small sample size of kindergarten teachers completing the SSIS; however, it is unknown whether this contributed to the present study's outcomes differing from previous research. Additionally, preschool teachers did not complete the SSIS prior to the kindergarten transition. Therefore, it is possible that there were differences between the control group and the intervention group prior to the transition, which makes definitive conclusions about the observed group differences in kindergarten teachers' ratings problematic.

Enhanced Transition Practices and Perceptions of

Parent/Teacher Involvement

There were no significant differences in how parents in the control or intervention groups perceived their involvement with teachers in either the preschool or kindergarten setting. These results may indicate that overall, the kindergarten transition process did not impact parent perceptions of their involvement or relationship with their child's teacher. It is possible that this particular group of parents of students transitioning to kindergarten did not perceive any change in their involvement with their child's teachers across

settings, viewing the kindergarten setting as an extension of the preschool setting. Previous research has suggested that continuity among caregiving systems (including schools) and positive relationships among parents and services providers (preschool and kindergarten teachers) contributes to the overall effectiveness of early intervention efforts (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). In addition, early collaborative experiences between parents and school staff can facilitate the development of a meaningful role construct while serving to promote future parental involvement (Sheridan et al., 2006).

Informally, some parents expressed concerns regarding not having the opportunity to meet with their child's kindergarten teacher prior to transitioning to kindergarten. Although kindergarten teachers were invited to attend the spring file transfer meeting where they would have had the opportunity to meet with parents prior to the kindergarten transition, this was not possible due to the delay within the school district included in the study in assigning preschool students to kindergarten teachers until the summer or early fall. The desire for parents to meet and share concerns with their child's kindergarten teacher before school starts is supported by research that suggests "broader issues of vertical curriculum alignment and continuity likely need to be addressed" (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008, p. 136). This communication and linkage between curriculum and academic principles taught between preschool and kindergarten may also contribute to successful transitions to kindergarten, where students are familiar with curriculum and ready to adapt to the kindergarten classroom setting. The importance of these linkages is further supported by research that suggests there is an association between preschool to kindergarten transition practices and positive kindergarten teachers' perceptions of students' academic competencies (Schulting et al., 2005). Although findings from the current study did not find differences in parent perceptions of school involvement across

groups, some parents did express a desire for more interaction with kindergarten staff from their child's school.

There also were no significant differences in how preschool teachers or kindergarten teachers in the control or intervention groups perceived their involvement with parents. Similar to parents' perceptions, both the preschool and kindergarten teachers sampled may have felt they had an adequate existing relationship with the parents of transitioning preschoolers regardless of the transition strategies utilized. The lack of difference between groups on ratings of teacher perceptions of their relationship with parents is also similar to research that found that a Conjoint Behavior Consultation model implemented in the early childhood setting did not impact teacher ratings of parental relationships (Sheridan et al., 2006).

Since both parent and teacher perceptions of their involvement or relationship did not differ between the control and intervention groups, these findings suggest that the enhanced transition practices had no effect overall on parent-teacher relationships at school. It is possible that the restricted sample, both in terms of numbers of participants and numbers of schools involved in the study, did not allow for any differences across groups to be determined statistically. It remains unknown whether a larger sample size may have produced different results.

Enhanced Transition Practices and Parent/Teacher

Perceptions

On measures of both parent and teacher perceptions of transition effectiveness, there were no significant differences between the control and intervention groups. These results suggest that parents felt equally supported through the transition process whether

they experienced the standard procedures (control group) or the enhanced procedures (intervention group) and were not significantly impacted by the addition of the enhanced procedures. It is also important to note that because the study took place in the naturalized school environment, some practices related to the transition from preschool to kindergarten occurred outside of the control of this study. In some cases, preschool teachers in the control group may have held end-of-the-year IEP meetings in which parents were able to discuss their concerns about the preschool to kindergarten transition, which was intended to be unique to the intervention group. Parents also may have felt connected to their child's kindergarten teacher as an extension of their experiences in the preschool program, and any differences between the two groups may not have become apparent until later in their child's schooling, such as at the end of the kindergarten school year. These findings may also suggest that participating parents felt supported through their child's transition, regardless of group assignment, solely due to the additional contact from the researcher based on their inclusion in the study. This selection bias may have impacted any potential differences in parent perceptions between groups.

There also were no significant differences in kindergarten teachers' perceptions of transition effectiveness between the control and intervention groups; however, it is important to note that at least half of the kindergarten teacher respondents returned uncompleted surveys back to the researcher because they did not feel they had the knowledge necessary to complete the Preschool Transition Survey. The kindergarten teachers' comments on these surveys that were returned incomplete listed reasons such as "I was not aware of any transition strategies," or "I did not know this student was on an IEP until the middle of the school year." These anecdotal comments highlight the lack of communication that still exists among general education teachers and special education

service providers. Although the current study aimed to close this communication gap for children with special needs transitioning between preschool and kindergarten, it is apparent that the enhanced transition procedures that were implemented were not extensive enough to eliminate gaps in communication across settings. Clearly, it remains an issue that needs to be addressed at the elementary school level in the school district in which the study took place. Although this theme has been outlined in previous research, good communication across settings is imperative for good relationships and collaboration to exist between programs in order to ensure successful transitions for young children with special needs (Rous, Teeters Meyers, & Buras Stricklin, 2007).

Enhanced Transition Practices and Parent/Teacher Acceptability

Parents and kindergarten teachers also rated their perceptions of the acceptability of the transition strategies used in the current study. No significant differences between the control and intervention groups were found on either parent or kindergarten teacher ratings of the acceptability of the implemented transition strategies. It should also be noted that the acceptability rates for kindergarten teachers may have been skewed given the low return rate of acceptability measures, it is possible that these kindergarten teachers may have chosen not to return the acceptability measure because they were particularly dissatisfied with the transition process. As was the case with the survey on perceptions of transition effectiveness, at least half of the kindergarten teachers who participated in the study returned the acceptability survey incomplete. Their stated reasons also were similar and included statements that indicated they were not aware of the transition strategies that had occurred, and they did not feel they had enough

information to complete the Treatment Acceptability Rating Scale. Although resource teachers and ancillary staff members were not initially included in this portion of the study, the researcher sought their input regarding their perceptions of the acceptability of the transition strategies. These special education teachers and staff members were included during the initial phase of the study where a majority of resource teachers and ancillary staff members were present at the file transfer meetings in the spring of the preschool year prior to the students transitioning to kindergarten. With their consent, the Treatment Acceptability Rating Scale was given to all resource teachers and ancillary staff members working with the students included in the study. Only six rating scales were returned all of which were for students who were participants in the intervention group. These rating scales had much higher means than those of the kindergarten teachers of students in the intervention group. They were also slightly higher than parent ratings of the same children who were in the intervention group. The rating scale means for the resource teachers/ancillary staff members were also higher than the means for the control group for both parents and kindergarten teachers. Although these differences cannot be compared statistically, it is important to highlight that in most cases, the resource teachers/ancillary staff members who attended students' file transfer meetings in the spring of the preschool year were the receiving school's main link to the preschool program, given their firsthand knowledge received during file transfer meetings. These staff members also frequently fulfill the role of disseminating information regarding a student's current level of functioning as well as any specialized instructional or behavioral interventions that may be necessary in the kindergarten classroom. By all appearances, this may not be happening for students when they reach the kindergarten setting, as evidenced by the low return rate of kindergarten teacher Preschool Transition

Rating Scales and the high number of responses that indicated they were unaware of any transition strategies, and in some cases the student's need for special education services.

This is particularly important, given the need for embedded instruction in the general education classroom as a support and generalization for skills learned in the special education setting (Ford, Davern, & Schnorr, 2001; Harrower, 1999; McDonnell, 1998; Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, Curtin, & Shrikanth, 1997; Wolery & Schuster, 1997). Several studies have successfully demonstrated the use of embedded instruction procedures to facilitate acquisition and maintenance of academic and developmental skills in the elementary general education class setting (Johnson, McDonnell, Holzwarth, & Hunter, 2004; McDonnell, Johnson, Polychronis, & Riesen, 2002; Wolery, 1996; Wolery et al., 1997). However, these embedded instruction strategies are highly unlikely to occur if special education teachers and ancillary staff members are not communicating about the students' needs and level of school readiness. Previous research has stressed the need to create collaborative relationships between special education and general education teachers in order to increase school success for students on IEPs (Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Griffin, & Kilgore, 2005).

Limitations

One limitation of the current study is the relatively small sample size, which included only five preschool teachers, 18 kindergarten teachers, six resource teachers, and 22 parents. It should also be noted that this limitation was especially prevalent at the end of the study, when only 18 parents returned post-transition questionnaires. Also, at the beginning of the study, many students were unable to be included in the study due to specific demographic factors that were previously determined for exclusion in the study.

For example, many students who would have been attending a Title 1 school during the 2013–2014 school year for kindergarten were excluded in order to account for socioeconomic factors that might have confounded results. Additionally, students who were to attend a diagnostic kindergarten setting during the 2013–2014 school year also were excluded due to their limited time in the general education kindergarten class and limited inclusion. All of these factors resulted in a limited pool of preschool students eligible to participate in the study. Although the sample size for student participants was small, these students likely varied from one another in regards to the nature of their disability as well as its impact on their academic and social outcomes. Given these factors, it is possible that the diversity within the small sample size was greater than what is reflected in the general population. This increased diversity also may have contributed to marginal differences between groups on the outcome measures.

The limitation of small sample size was further compounded due to a low rate of return of some of the study questionnaires from consenting participants. Resource teachers and ancillary staff members were asked near the end of the study to provide information regarding their opinions on the acceptability of transition strategies. Adding these staff members late in the study may have contributed to their low rate of return of the Treatment Acceptability Rating Scale. Although the six resource teachers and ancillary staff members who returned Treatment Acceptability Rating Scales generally responded favorably for students in the intervention group, it is difficult to generalize how acceptable the enhanced transition practices were overall due to the restricted sample size. This rationale also applies to the generalization of the overall findings of this study, due to the small number of parents and teachers who participated.

Another limitation of the current study is that some of the primary measures used, including the Preschool Transition Survey (i.e., teacher version and parent version) as well as the Treatment Acceptability Rating Scale (i. e., teacher version and parent version), were created specifically for use in the current study. However, the development of these measures was advantageous in some aspects, including the ability to capture specific information unique to the current study. Although these measures were created by including items taken from existing measures with acceptable reliability and validity, a limitation of the current study that no information as to the reliability and validity of these specific instruments is available.

A third limitation to the current study may have been due to differences in raters across the preschool and kindergarten settings. Although the participating parents as raters did not change from the preschool to kindergarten years, the participating students' teachers changed from preschool to kindergarten. This limitation may have made it difficult for kindergarten teachers to accurately rate students, based on their limited knowledge of these students prior to kindergarten. As previously mentioned, many kindergarten teachers returned ratings for students that were incomplete due to their lack of knowledge regarding any specific preschool to kindergarten transition strategies. Although many of these kindergarten teachers may have perceived that no transition strategies took place, it is more likely that they did occur (particularly in the case of students in the intervention group), but that the kindergarten teachers were unaware of their occurrence. This is likely due to the common practice that almost all special education teachers and ancillary staff members are aware of which preschoolers are transitioning to their school in any given year due to their attendance at a mandatory Spring file transfer meeting for these staff members. Kindergarten teachers, on the other

hand, are typically not informed of their class lists until the middle of the Summer or the Fall, when their building administrator creates such lists. In almost all cases, kindergarten teachers were unaware of which students would be in their classroom in the Fall at the end of the 2013 school year, let alone which preschool students with IEPs would be transitioning to their classrooms.

Implications for Practice

One of the primary goals of the current study was to determine whether enhanced preschool transition strategies had an impact on preschool students with special needs' successful transition to kindergarten as compared to students who did not receive enhanced transition strategies. In examining the study's findings, an important consideration is determining how this information may be used to improve the transition from preschool to kindergarten for students with special needs in order to lead to positive social and academic outcomes. Although this study did not find any significant academic and social outcomes associated with the implemented transition strategies, it is important to continue research in this field, given the lasting positive effects an effective transition can have on young children while serving as a protective factor against behavioral and academic challenges (Ramey & Ramey, 1998). An effective transition as a protective factor is particularly important, given the research indicating that preschoolers at risk for learning difficulties, such as preschoolers currently receiving special education services, may experience significant difficulties transitioning to kindergarten without appropriate supports in place across settings (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007; Rous et al., 2010; Yeboah, 2002).

Another implication for the current study is the need to create stronger

connections with special education teachers and ancillary staff members at receiving schools. Although kindergarten teachers may not have access to class lists and student files until the Fall, special education teachers and ancillary staff members can serve as valued team members and strong advocates for preschool students in regards to knowledge of these students' skill levels and potential needs in the kindergarten classroom setting. Since the participating special education teachers and resource teachers were required to attend a file transfer meeting where they received specific information regarding individual transitioning preschool teachers, they were in a unique position of being able to provide kindergarten teachers with information, which may be critically important for kindergarten teachers to know prior to the student's arrival in the Fall. Additionally, this collaboration is critical for special education and regular education staff members in kindergarten due to the inherent differences that are present between early childhood and kindergarten classrooms. In the current study, special education teachers who were licensed both as special education teachers and general education teachers taught in all the preschool classrooms. In the kindergarten classroom, students in special education receive special education services via their special education teacher and/or ancillary services provider, which may not occur in the general education classroom. Obviously, this changes the nature of collaborative work among professionals between early childhood settings and elementary classrooms (Dunst, 2002; Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron, & Hughes, 2008). Therefore, it is important to maintain a collaborative style of communication in order to efficiently communicate student needs not only across school staff, but between home and school, given previous research findings that have indicated that parents rely on the frequent involvement and engagement they experience in the early childhood setting (Dunst, 2002; Villeneuve et

al., 2013). Additionally, the special education teacher and ancillary service provider are in the unique position to serve as advocates for families of students transitioning to kindergarten. Within their roles as special educators, it may be beneficial for these staff members to assume the responsibility of following these students throughout the transition process while building upon connections that were made previously in the spring through opportunities to discuss individual students at their file transfer meetings. In the current study these special educators were not officially tasked with overseeing the transition process, but this may be a change in practice that could lead to smoother transitions in the future. The need for a facilitator or advocate within the school context who is committed to supporting families throughout the first year of a child's transition has been demonstrated in previous research (Janus et al., 2008). The importance of special educators facilitating these linkages between families and schools has also been demonstrated (Villeneuve & Hutchinson, 2012).

Another important issue to address is the limited amount of contact between preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents that occurs prior to the preschool to kindergarten transition. Many studies have addressed the need for both the preschool and kindergarten to facilitate a collaborative relationship between the two settings. One main obstacle preventing this from occurring in many kindergarten settings is the late development of kindergarten class lists, which hinders proactive communication between parents and teachers on both ends. This lack of communication directly interferes with research findings that indicate that successful transitions from preschool to kindergarten are mediated by linkages between systems, specifically connections between schools and families and between preschool and kindergarten teachers (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). School administrators should strive to make registration for kindergarten a priority

in school communities by providing parents with frequent and early opportunities to register for kindergarten (Smythe-Leistico, 2012). This push for early registration may also make it possible for administrators to create and disseminate earlier class lists to families and potential preschool programs that may be involved in the preschool to kindergarten transition process. Administrators are often the impetus for change in a school setting, so it is well within their scope to make successful preschool to kindergarten transitions a priority in their schools, given the research that suggests administrative barriers can limit their knowledge of staff members' roles and the use of services and supports to facilitate school readiness, in addition to academic and social inclusion (Villeneuve, 2011). These changes can be easily implemented within a school setting. Simply providing broad supports such as a Back to School night at the beginning of the school year to facilitate parent, teacher, and student introductions may be a cost effective way to improve transitions for preschoolers with disabilities.

Implications for Future Research

Further research is needed in the area of preschool to kindergarten transition for children with special needs. Specifically, studies with larger sample sizes are needed in order to obtain more comprehensive information regarding the effects of enhanced preschool transition practices with students with special needs. To obtain more representative findings among preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten, it would be beneficial not only to expand the sample size but also include participants from a variety of settings and regions (Geiser, Horwitz, & Gerstein, 2012). The recruitment of more participants across raters, including parents, teachers, ancillary staff members, and administrators, would also allow for more insight regarding the transition process and use

of effective strategies. This is in line with the Linkages project (Geiser et al., 2012), which highlighted setting-level (e.g., school) factors as well as system-level factors (e.g., district, region, state), that shape individual-level outcomes, such as increased feelings of comfort, belonging, competency, leadership, and efficacy among children and families.

Another area for future research includes involving administrators and other ancillary service providers in regard to their perceptions of transition strategies and practices. Studies that have included a variety of school professionals (Geiser et al., 2012) have demonstrated effective collaboration among key stakeholders, including district administrators, in an effort to impact systems-level changes. This also helps not only to ensure collaboration when transitioning preschoolers to kindergarten, but to position early childhood educators and administrators as professional colleagues and peers (Geiser et al., 2012). This is important given the lack of involvement some building administrators have with their preschool staff and their level of involvement during the preschool to kindergarten transition. Enhancing administrator knowledge and participation is critical, given research that suggests “many school administrators have little or no training in how to design, implement, and evaluate programs for very young children” (Kostelnik & Grady, 2009, p.vii). Additional efforts to improve preschool to kindergarten transitions overall would be beneficial to students, families, teachers, and administrators, based on the research that suggests students who attend preschool and half-day kindergarten are more likely to have higher reading skills by the third grade than students who attend full-day kindergarten alone (Hull, 2011). Given these facts, it is evident that greater collaboration with preschool staff is necessary in order to serve students effectively.

Although preschoolers and kindergartners attending Title I schools were screened out of the participant sample for the purpose of the current study, it would be beneficial to include preschoolers from less economically advantaged schools in future research. This is important, given the recent push to examine the quality, cost, efficacy, and outcomes of early childhood education programs aimed at serving students who are at greater developmental risk, given their socioeconomic status (Clifford, Peisner-Feinberg, Culking, Howes, & Kagan, 1998). Research has also indicated that high-risk children who participate in high-quality early childhood education programs are likely to make gains in their developmental progress (Bagnato et al., 2002). Although high-quality preschool and kindergarten and kindergarten can have a huge impact on outcomes for high-risk children, research in this field has indicated that low-income students typically enter kindergarten with less developed school readiness skills, placing them at further risk upon their entrance into kindergarten (Aber, Jones, & Raver, 2007; Zill & West, 2001). However, there is evidence to suggest that high-quality kindergarten transition activities may aid in reducing achievement gaps for low-income preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten (Schulting, 2008).

Although research has begun to investigate transition strategies for these at-risk students, future research should investigate how transition strategies can help better prepare transitioning preschoolers with special needs who are at risk due to socioeconomic factors. The current research in this area emphasizes the need to involve families, schools, and community partners through supporting positive home-school partnerships (Wandersman et al., 2008). It was through this research that the Ready Freddy transition model was developed by the University of Pittsburgh Office of Child Development (2006), which was specifically designed to “address the inequality and gaps

in services for low-income urban children” with an emphasis on “parent engagement and community partnerships” (Smythe-Leistico, Young, Mulvey, & McCall, 2012, p. 4). The Ready Freddy program was based on action elements that emerged from previous research and interviews with stakeholders with a main emphasis on “a) Transition Teams that plan and implement community-specific, quality transition activities before school starts; b) summer Kindergarten Clubs targeted to the most at-risk families, that promote parent-child interactions and foster sustained parent involvement; c) community outreach to find and engage parents; and d) support to schools to create a welcoming environment for both students and parents” (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012, p. 12). Early findings of the Ready Freddy program indicate parents and teachers reported positive interactions with one another, and overall, sampled teachers indicated that students who participated in Kindergarten Clubs demonstrated fewer problems with school readiness (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012).

Programs such as Ready Freddy that focus on high-risk students could be easily adapted for families and preschool students with special needs. A systems approach to ensuring successful transitions that involves collaboration with families, teachers, and multiple stakeholders is appropriate for students with special needs, given the likelihood they are often receiving wrap-around supports not only from their school, but also through other community service providers. This may also serve to support parents and provide linkages between previous services and those that their students will be receiving throughout kindergarten. In some cases, outside related service providers and community agency partners may perceive themselves as playing an integral role in the preschool to kindergarten transition, given their close working relationship with students and their families (Myers, 2007; Myers & Effgen, 2006; Prigg, 2001). Further research on

enhanced transition practices for preschoolers with special needs in rural areas may also serve as an additional focus of study, due to their limited access to resources. Intervention programs focusing on high-risk preschoolers from rural areas have previously been implemented with some success as an avenue to prepare families for the transition to school (Hourihan & Hoban, 2004). The Learning, Enjoying Growing, Support (LEGS) model described by Hourihan and Hoban (2004) also included multiple related service providers across a continuum of services ranging from early childhood field specialists to nurses who were involved in program delivery. This emphasis on rural communities may help families to become aware of services available to their preschoolers with special needs earlier while involving them in wrap-around services to support the entire family system.

Conclusions

Although the current study did not support conclusions regarding the effectiveness of enhanced transition procedures, other than anecdotal evidence, this finding may largely be due to the limited sample size of the study. The statistical analyses conducted on data collected in the current study likely were not able to pick up on subtle differences between groups, which may have been evident with a larger sample size. In addition, the sample used for the current study may not have represented a sufficiently diverse group, given the relatively similar demographic backgrounds of participants. Interventions that involved more frequent contact with participants may have also increased the likelihood of a more powerful outcome for transitioning students. Future research in this area may include more specific and intense interventions, a larger and

more diverse sample size, and more opportunities for families and students to meet with their kindergarten teachers prior to the beginning of the kindergarten year.

APPENDIX A

PARENT-TEACHER INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

(PTIQ) – PARENT VERSION

Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Brief Form – Parent Version)

Child's Name: _____ Today's Date: _____

Your Relationship to Child: _____

You are your child's first and most important teacher. When your child goes to school, teachers become important to him/her. You and the teachers can work together to help your child do well in school. So, we would like some information about your relationship with your child's school teacher.

Please circle the number corresponding to the response that best describes your feelings.

1. You enjoy talking with your child's teacher.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

2. You feel your child's teacher cares about your child.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

3. You think your child's teacher is interested in getting to know you.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

4. You feel comfortable talking with your child's teacher about your child.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

5. You feel your child's teacher pays attention to your suggestions.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

6. You ask your child's teacher questions or make suggestions about your child.

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

APPENDIX B

PARENT-TEACHER INVOLVEMENT QUESTIONNAIRE (PTIQ) – TEACHER VERSION

Parent and Teacher Involvement Questionnaire (Brief Form – Teacher Version)

Child's Name: _____ Today's Date: _____
Your Name: _____

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers. When a child goes to school, teachers become important to him/her as well. You and a child's parents can work together to help the child do well in school. So, we would like some information about your relationship with this child's parent(s).

Please circle the number corresponding to the response that best describes your feelings.

1. The parent(s) of this child are interested in getting to know me.

0	1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

2. You are able to talk to this child's parent(s).

0	1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

3. You are comfortable talking with the parent(s) about this child's problems.

0	1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

4. The parent(s) seem to have the same goals for this child as I do.

0	1	2	3	4
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

5. Since the beginning of the school year, how often has the parent made suggestions to you about this child?

0	1	2	3	4
Not At All	A Little	Some	A Lot	A Great Deal

APPENDIX C

PRESCHOOL TRANSITION SURVEY – PARENT VERSION

Transition Survey – Parent Version

Questions about your child and family:

- 1) Child's gender:
 - 1) Male
 - 2) Female

- 2) What is your child's race/ethnic background?
 - 1) White/Caucasian
 - 2) Black/African American
 - 3) Hispanic/Latino
 - 4) Asian
 - 5) Native American
 - 6) Pacific Islander
 - 7) Mixed
 - 8) Other (please specify):

- 3) How many adult family members reside in your home including yourself? _____

- 4) How many children reside in your home including your preschool child? ____

- 5) What is your family's approximate total annual income?
 - a. \$14,999 or less
 - b. \$15,000-\$24,999
 - c. \$25,000-\$34,999
 - d. \$35,000-\$44,999
 - e. \$45,000-\$54,999
 - f. \$55,000-\$64,999
 - g. \$65,000-\$74,999
 - h. \$75,000-\$84,999
 - i. \$85,000-\$99,999
 - j. \$100,000+

- 6) Is English the primary language spoken in your child's home?
 - 0) No (if no, please specify primary language):

 - 1) Yes

- 7) If your child had Early Intervention (EI) services prior to preschool, when did these services begin and when did they end?

8) What is your child's current classification for special education services?

- 1) Speech Language Impairment (SLI)
 - 2) Developmental Delay (DD)
 - 3) Autism
 - 4) Other Health Impairment (OHI)
 - 5) Intellectual Delay (ID)
 - 6) Other (please specify):
-

9) Do you have other children who have received special education services?

- 0) No
- 1) Yes

10) When your child attends kindergarten next year will he/she have older siblings attending their same school?

- 0) No
- 1) Yes

Please describe how much each of the following areas concerned you as your child transitioned to kindergarten. **Circle the number that describes how concerned you were, using the scale below:**

	No Concerns		Some Concerns		Many Concerns
11) Academics (e.g., knowing the alphabet)	1	2	3	4	5
12) Behavior problems (e.g., throwing tantrums)	1	2	3	4	5
13) Following directions	1	2	3	4	5
14) Getting along with other children	1	2	3	4	5
15) Getting along with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
16) Getting used to a new school	1	2	3	4	5
17) Child being ready for kindergarten	1	2	3	4	5
18) Separating from family	1	2	3	4	5
19) Toilet training	1	2	3	4	5
20) Ability to communicate needs	1	2	3	4	5

21) Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5
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Transition Planning:

How helpful were each of the following as your child transitioned to kindergarten?
Circle the number that describes the level of helpfulness, using the scale below:

	Very Helpful		Somewhat Helpful		Not Helpful or Not provided
22) Information about your child's preschool program.	1	2	3	4	5
23) Information about your child's kindergarten program.	1	2	3	4	5
24) Information about your child's skills (e.g., strengths and weaknesses).	1	2	3	4	5
25) Information about your child's new teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
26) Information about your child's new school.	1	2	3	4	5
27) Information about kindergarten academic expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
28) Information about kindergarten behavior expectations.	1	2	3	4	5
29) Information about how the preschool program was preparing for transition.	1	2	3	4	5
30) Information on how	1	2	3	4	5

the kindergarten program was preparing for transition.					
31) Information on what you should have been doing at home to prepare for the transition.	1	2	3	4	5
32) Level of emotional support and encouragement from school staff.	1	2	3	4	5
33) Level of emotional support and encouragement from your family.	1	2	3	4	5
34) Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5

Parental Involvement in Transition:

	Very Involved		Somewhat Involved		Not Involved
35) How involved were you in your child's transition to kindergarten ?	1	2	3	4	5
36) How well did your child's preschool teacher involve you in the transition process and value your opinion?	1	2	3	4	5
37) How well did your child's kindergarten teacher involve you in the transition process and value your opinion?	1	2	3	4	5

School Involvement in Transition:

What kinds of transition activities did you have in your child's transition to kindergarten and how sufficient were these practices? **Please circle the most accurate response for each type of activity.**

	Suffic- ient		More Needed		Did Not Occur
38) Regular contact (e.g. phone, visit) with your child's preschool teacher.	1	2	3	4	5
39) Annual meetings with your child's preschool teacher/school staff.	1	2	3	4	5
40) Attended a transition planning meeting with your child's preschool staff.	1	2	3	4	5
41) Attended a file transfer meeting with your child's kindergarten staff.	1	2	3	4	5
42) Visited your child's kindergarten classroom and/or elementary school with your child.	1	2	3	4	5
43) Was a member of a transition planning team at your child's preschool .	1	2	3	4	5
44) Attended a transition information meeting at your child's preschool or kindergarten .	1	2	3	4	5
45) Received a phone call from your child's school staff over the summer.	1	2	3	4	5
46) Received a home visit from your child's school staff during kindergarten transition.	1	2	3	4	5
47) Attended an orientation session about kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
48) Received written communication regarding transition from your child's	1	2	3	4	5

preschool (e.g., letter or flier).					
49) Received written communication regarding transition from your child's kindergarten or elementary school (e.g., letter or flier).	1	2	3	4	5
50) Attended kindergarten registration.	1	2	3	4	5
51) Attended an open house at kindergarten .	1	2	3	4	5
52) Attended a parent teacher conference during preschool .	1	2	3	4	5
53) Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5

54) What were the **primary issues** for your child as he/she transitioned to kindergarten?

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

55) Are any of the above issues still a problem?

- 0) No
- 1) Somewhat
- 2) Definitely (please clarify): _____
- _____
- _____

APPENDIX D

PRESCHOOL TRANSITION SURVEY – TEACHER VERSION

Transition Survey – Teacher Version

- 1) How many years of experience have you had as a teacher?
 - a. 0-4
 - b. 4-8
 - c. 8-12
 - d. 12-16
 - e. 16-20
 - f. 20-24
 - g. 24+

- 2) How long has this student been in your classroom?
 - a. Less than 1 year
 - b. 1 year
 - c. 2 years
 - d. 3 years

- 3) How many students are in this student's kindergarten classroom?

- 4) How many students in this student's classroom are on IEPs?

- 5) What is your gender?
 - 1) Male
 - 2) Female

- 6) What is your age? _____

- 7) What is your race/ethnic background?
 - 1) White/Caucasian
 - 2) Black/African American
 - 3) Hispanic/Latino
 - 4) Asian
 - 5) Native American
 - 6) Pacific Islander
 - 7) Mixed
 - 8) Other (please specify):

- 8) What is the highest grade of education you have completed? (1-12=HS; 13-16=College; 16+ =Post-College)
Please circle your response:

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

- 9) What is your highest degree obtained?
- 0) None
 - 1) High School Diploma/GED
 - 2) Vocational Degree/Certificate
 - 3) Associates Degree (2-year college degree)
 - 4) Bachelor's Degree (4-year college degree)
 - 5) Master's Degree
 - 6) Doctorate (e.g., Ph.D, M.D.)

Questions about this student:

Please describe how much each of the following areas are a concern for you since this student has transitioned to kindergarten. **Circle the number that describes the level of concern you have, using the scale below:**

	No Concerns		Some Concerns		Many Concerns
10) Academics (e.g., knowing the alphabet)	1	2	3	4	5
11) Behavior problems (e.g., tantrums)	1	2	3	4	5
12) Following directions	1	2	3	4	5
13) Getting along with other children	1	2	3	4	5
14) Getting along with the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
15) Getting used to a new school	1	2	3	4	5
16) Child being ready for kindergarten	1	2	3	4	5
17) Separating from family	1	2	3	4	5
18) Toilet training	1	2	3	4	5
19) Ability to communicate needs	1	2	3	4	5
20) Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5

Transition Planning:

How helpful were each of the following as this student transitioned to kindergarten?
Circle the number that describes the level of helpfulness, using the scale below:

	Very Helpful		Somewhat Helpful		Not Helpful or Not Provided
21) Information about this student's preschool program.	1	2	3	4	5
22) Information about this student's disability or IEP goals.	1	2	3	4	5
23) Information about this student's academic skills (e.g., strengths and weaknesses)	1	2	3	4	5
24) Information about this student's behavior/social skills (e.g., strengths and weaknesses)	1	2	3	4	5
25) Information about how the preschool program was preparing for transition.	1	2	3	4	5
26) Information on what the kindergarten program should have been doing to help this student transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
27) Amount of contact with preschool staff during transition.	1	2	3	4	5
28) Amount of contact with this student's family during transition.	1	2	3	4	5
29) Other (please specify):	1	2	3	4	5

Questions regarding this student's progress in kindergarten:

	Very		Somewhat		Not at all
30) How well was this student prepared for kindergarten?	1	2	3	4	5
31) How appropriate was the decision to place this student in a traditional kindergarten setting?	1	2	3	4	5
32) How aware were you of this student's IEP goals and services?	1	2	3	4	5

Questions regarding this student's parental involvement:

	Very		Somewhat		Not at all
33) This student's parent(s) was/were involved in this student's transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
34) This student's parent(s) was/were involved in the transition process and their opinion was valued.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX E

TRANSITION ACCEPTABILITY RATING SCALE – PARENT VERSION

Transition Acceptability Questionnaire – Parent Version

Please indicate your opinions regarding the strategies used for your child's transition from preschool to kindergarten. Circle the number that describes how much you agree with each statement

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1. The transition strategies used were appropriate for this child transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most parents would find these transition strategies appropriate for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
3. These transition strategies should prove effective in helping preschoolers transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I would suggest the use of these kindergarten transition strategies to other parents.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most parents would find these transition strategies suitable for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I would be willing to use these transition strategies again or with my other children.	1	2	3	4	5
7. These transition strategies would be appropriate for a variety of preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I like the kindergarten transition strategies that were used.	1	2	3	4	5
9. These transition strategies were a good way to meet the needs of a preschooler transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Overall, the kindergarten transition strategies were beneficial for my child and family.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX F

TRANSITION ACCEPTABILITY RATING SCALE – TEACHER VERSION

Transition Acceptability Questionnaire – Teacher Version

Please indicate your opinions regarding the strategies used for this student's transition from preschool to kindergarten. Circle the number that describes how much you agree with each statement

	Strongly Disagree		Neutral		Strongly Agree
1. The transition strategies used were appropriate for this student transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Most teachers would find these transition strategies appropriate for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
3. The transition strategies should prove effective in helping preschoolers transition to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
4. I would suggest the use of these transition strategies to other teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Most teachers would find these transition strategies suitable for preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I would be willing to use these transition strategies again or with other students.	1	2	3	4	5
7. These transition strategies would be appropriate for a variety of preschoolers transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
8. I like the transition strategies that were used.	1	2	3	4	5
9. These transition strategies were a good way to meet the needs of a preschooler transitioning to kindergarten.	1	2	3	4	5
10. Overall, the kindergarten transition strategies were beneficial for this student and this student's family.	1	2	3	4	5

APPENDIX G

CONSULTATION FIDELITY CHECKLIST

**Consultation Fidelity Checklist
for Kindergarten Transition File Transfer Meeting**

Which of the following steps were initiated by the facilitator during the file transfer meeting?

For each step, please indicate whether the step occurred, did not occur, or partially occurred (i.e. incomplete).

	Occurred	Partially Occurred	Did Not Occur
1) Discussed the roles of each participant at the meeting and the importance of each participant's contributions.	1	2	3
2) Stated that everyone's information is vital.	1	2	3
3) Stated the expertise of each participant involved.	1	2	3
4) Demonstrated interest in all team members.	1	2	3
5) Discussed steps of the meeting.	1	2	3
6) Discussed the child's, family's, and teacher's strengths.	1	2	3
7) Discussed parents' goals and desires for the child.	1	2	3
8) Discussed preschool teacher's concerns (if any) for the transitioning student (or stated there were none).	1	2	3
9) Discussed parents' concerns (if any) for the transitioning child (or stated there were none).	1	2	3
10) Discussed how the transitioning child's IEP goals will be served in the kindergarten setting.	1	2	3

Name of Person Completing Checklist:

Date: _____

Study ID of Child Transitioning: ____

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